



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

Vol: 17/2001

No: 1

DEC 1987

EDITORIAL

In a meeting of the executive committee, held on 14th October 1987, it was proposed that the BSAP bring out a monthly bulletin to inform members of the next month's programme and report important bird-news on time. The committee decided to call this bulletin, 'PITTA' as this is a word which has come into ornithology, from the Telugu 'pitta', meaning a small bird, latinized by Vieillot in 1816 (Analyse, p. 42) as the name of a genus, and since adopted by English ornithologists as the general name for a group of birds, called by the French 'Breves', and remarkable for their great beauty. In ornithology the word is first found as part of the native name, "Ponnunky pitta," of a bird, given in 1713 by Petiver, in the "mantissa" to John Ray's (1628-1705) SYNOPSIS (p. 195), on the authority of one Edward Buckley of Fort St. George, Madras city. This was the first attempt to catalogue the birds of any part of the British possessions in India. This bird is the 'Pitta bengalensis' of modern ornithologists, and is said by Jerdon in BIRDS OF INDIA, i. 503, to bear the Telugu name of "Pona-inki". [Eds:- This above information is from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition, 1911. (notwithstanding many a dig at the editor's name!)]

The BSAP's newsletter, MAYURA, will be published twice a year, in July and December, from 1988.

PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- 18th : Film Show.

Venue:- The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.00 p.m.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

1) 10th : HIMAYAT SAGAR.

This will be a half day trip and members can expect to be back by 1.00 p.m. Himayat Sagar is one of the two reservoirs constructed on the Musi river, a tributary of the Krishna, to provide drinking water to the residents of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Earlier visits have resulted in such interesting sightings as Large Cormorant, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill and Rufousbellied Babbler.

ii) 24th : ICRISAT Complex in Patancheru, Medak District.

This is one of the best birding spots around Hyderabad where one can list upto a 100 birds on a single day in the winter! Barheaded Geese, Pied Harrier, Redheaded Merlin, Grey Plovers, Ruffs and many species of duck have been seen in the past. Participants are advised to bring light snacks.

NEWS

* The Jerdon's Courser was among the most endangered birds of the world until rediscovered in mid January 1986 by Bharat Bhushan.

Working under the aegis of the Endangered Species Project of the Bombay Natural History Society, Bharat was assisted in his discovery by a village herdsman, Aitanna. On 3/12/1987 members of the BSAP were treated to an audio-visual programme on the Jerdon's Courser by Bharat Bhushan. None who were present in that meeting can forget the male Jerdon's Courser seated beside a stone, sunlight glinting in his endangered eye! According to Bharat, the key to the continued survival of this bird is the protection of its habitat. All his sightings of the bird have been within the narrow strip of scrub along the foothills of the Lankamalai range. Neither up the hill slopes, nor away from them, on the plains. This is the habitat and country where Jerdon had seen the bird in the 1840s. Blanford collected a bird from near Bhadrachalam town in 1871 but according to Bharat, today's Bhadrachalam has expanded so much that scrub jungle around the town has almost completely disappeared. Since his first sighting, he has seen the birds 8 times. The Telugu Ganga Canal threatened to cut right through the reserve forest area where Aitanna picked up the bird, till its alignment was changed. Now it will pass just outside the RF. Will the birds withstand the disturbance of construction teams? How many birds are there actually? Bharat feels ringing them is the only way to find out.

*** Asian Waterfowl Census:-** Last year, the first ever Asian Waterfowl Census was conducted by the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau. In India they were assisted by the Bombay Natural History Society, represented by Dr. S. A. Hussain and the Ecological Society, represented by Mr Prakash Gole, both of whom are the national coordinators for the country. In Andhra Pradesh, 12 waterbodies were covered. The largest concentrations of duck were those of Pintails and Spotbills at Pocharam, numbering 1405 and 1190 respectively. Other interesting sightings were of Indian Reef Heron (1 at Bhimasinghi), Large Whistling Teal (2 at Bhimasinghi) and Curlew-Sandpiper (18 at Kondakarla).

This winter (1987-88) the Waterfowl Census will be held on the 10th of January throughout India. Interested members may please collect forms from Mr Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, Hyderabad - 500 012.

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Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by Aasheesh Pittie and P Balkoteshwar Rao.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

Kumar, Atul

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HYDERABAD - 500 012
Andhra Pradesh

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

13/2
2001

No.2

FEB 1988

EDITORIAL

Some of our members participated in this years' Asian Waterfowl Census and the Society sent a consolidated report alongwith their individual report cards to the national coordinator, Dr S A Hussain of the Bombay Natural History Society. The importance of this exercise according to the compiler of the report ASIAN WATERFOWL 1987, Joost van der Ven, "is to get a certain impression about the size of the population of several species. Especially those species that winter in large concentrations. Species like Moorhen and Redwattled Lapwing are included to get a certain impression about the numbers observed. . . On the other hand, these counts also give an impression about the wetlands and their importance for birds in the different countries. Regular counts can really support this knowledge." Coming to the section of reports from India he states, "the distribution of waterfowl in a particular season generally reflects the vagries of the monsoon in India. It is uncommon that monsoon rains are evenly distributed all over the country. Usually rains fall in certain regions leading to dry lakes and river-beds while other regions experience soil erosion and damage to property due to floods. Birds adjust to these conditions and shift to areas where they are congenial."

PROGRAMME FOR FEBRUARY 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- 15th : Film Show.

Venue:- The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.00 p.m.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 7th : MANJIRA BARRAGE, Medak District.

This will be a full day trip and members are requested to carry lunch boxes with them. An added benefit of this trip is the journey further on to Singur Project where last year members were enthralled by 6000 Demoiselle Cranes! Manjira itself harbours a good variety of ducks including the beautiful Wigeon. At another point on this trip one may see different types of waders and marsh birds including Blacktailed Godwit and Glossy Ibis!

ii) 28th : NARSAPUR RESERVE FOREST, Medak District.

Another day long trip. Please bring lunch. 35 kms from the city is this patch of truly beautiful deciduous jungle. Lush greenery, a small brook with many a quiet pool, fresh clean lungfulls of air and abundant birding. The atmosphere reverberates with the mimicry of Chloropsises. At least 5 species of cuckoos have been seen here in a day! The Whitethroated Ground Thrush and the Blackbacked Woodpecker are

bonus attractions.

NEWS

* Asian Waterfowl Census:- Given below is a list of members who participated in the Asian Waterfowl Census between 10th January and 1st February this year and, the areas they covered.

- 1) Siraj Taher, Humayun Taher, Suhail Quader and Vijay Kumar - Manjira Barrage in Medak District.
- 2) Aasheesh Pittie - ICRISAT complex in Medak District.
- 3) Rajeev Mathew - Pocharam Lake in Medak District.
- 4) Siraj Taher - Himayat Sagar, Osman Sagar and Gangaram Lake, which latter is in Ranga Reddy District.
- 5) K N Sudhir Rao - Ibrahimpatan and Ghatkesar.
- 6) Kaushal Gangakhedkar - Hussain Sagar and Pedda and Chinna Balanagar Ceruvu.
- 7) M S Kulkarni and H R Vidyashankar - Shamirpet and Fox Sagar.
- 8) Siraj Taher, Humayun Taher, Maj. A A Aziz and E Narsimlu - Nellapattu and Pulicat Bird Sanctuaries and Sriharikota Island in Nellore District.
- 9) E Narsimlu - Vederepettu and Varagali lakes also in Nellore District.

* On 18-1-88 Binod Choudhury gave a talk on the mangrove forests of Guntur District which he visited in December 1987. Supplemented with maps of creeks and slides of the habitat, BC emphasised that this 100 sq. km. mangrove in the Krishna estuary is of prime quality and much importance on the east coast of India. Residents told him what good natural barriers mangroves make against cyclonic storms! Pelican nesting and large concentrations of Reef Herons, Curlews, Blackwinged Stilts and various other waders in this area was of interest to members. He also reported sea-turtle nesting on the sea-shore side off the False Divi-Point towards Nizampatnam. Slides of shore-crabs, reef herons and a Blackcapped Kingfisher in flight on a backdrop of mangrove vegetation made everyone envious of BC visiting such exotic places. But many changed their mind after seeing slides of him walking in waist deep mud!

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PITTA

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BOOK-POST

Printed Matter

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HYDERABAD - 500 012

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P I T T A

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Ind 13/2/2001

No.3 & 4

MAR & APR 1988

EDITORIAL

Bharat Bhushan, that young scientist of the Bombay Natural History Society, who has done so much in the recent past for the ornithology of Andhra Pradesh, was in the city recently. In an informal and impromptu meeting with some Society members he mooted the idea of a CONSERVATION ACTION GROUP OF ANDHRA PRADESH. This would be a body of individuals who are deeply interested in the health of the environment and its continued well-being. At the outset, members of the group would be required to gather data of environmental or conservational significance, and forward it to a data bank being maintained at the Bombay Natural History Society. Data will be varied to the extreme and members have to keep themselves sharp. Proposals for irrigation/thermal projects, extent of reserve forest areas and their actual status today, birdwatching lists, animals seen in districts, parks, etc., notifications/tenders for beedi-leaf collections, grassland cutting, proposals for the creation of new parks, sanctuaries, etc., information on forest plantation and allied forestry programmes -- all of which can be collected easily through local media, on field trips and through discussions with governmental officials. Once this data base gets under way, services of the Action Group will begin to broaden. Conservation project proposals within the Groups' area will be sent to it for comments and criticisms. Members can create a forum for or against government projects and give suitable suggestions towards better implementation of a project or its side effects - like the translocation of tribals. The possibilities are unlimited. For participation, please write to Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD - 500 012 or directly to Bharat Bhushan, C/o Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, BOMBAY - 400 023. There will be no membership fee. There might be a better, healthier, more aware Andhra Pradesh.

PROGRAMME FOR MARCH & APRIL 1988

1) INDOOR MEETINGS :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.00 p.m.

i) 21/3 : Film Show.

ii) 11/4 : Siraj Taher gives an audio-visual presentation on his recent visit to Pulicat and Nellapattu Bird Sanctuaries.

iii) 25/4 : Talk by Suhail Quader on his short stay at Narsapur.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department. As in every earlier year, field trips will be restricted to one a month from April upto September.

i) 13/3 : Destination - surprise!

ii) 27/3 : MAHAVIR HARIN VANASTHALI.

The place for bounding Blackbuck! Typical scrub and dry

deciduous vegetation of the deccan. On an early morning walk through this deer park one might be lucky in spotting a sounder of Wild Boar with 7-8 striped young frisking along behind in single file. Twice members have observed the Short-toed Eagle nesting here on the topmost branch of a Butea tree. Nests of the Black Drongo and Little Minivet have also been seen. Vanasthali has a municipal dump behind it where hundreds of Whitebacked, Longbilled and Egyptian Vultures can be observed either sunning themselves or soaring overhead. This will be a half day trip.

iii) 17/4 : NEHRU ZOOLOGICAL PARK.

On this half day trip, members will be taken for a walk through the Lion Safari Park, before the lions are released for the day! This one place is worth the whole trip as the less disturbed area harbours many an avian delight. On the whole, the mix of habitats makes the zoo one of the best and most exciting areas around Hyderabad for birding. You just might get a peek into the Nocturnal House too!

NEWS

* COMPARATIVE STATEMENT OF ASIAN WATERFOWL COUNTS BY MEMBERS OF BSAP IN ANDHRA PRADESH FOR 1987 & 1988

GROUP	1987 (10 sites)	1988 (19 sites)
Grebes	507	108
Cormorants	269	2107
Egrets, Herons	752	3130
Storks	440	464
Ibises, Spoonbills	163	212
Flamingos	7	2238
Geese	671	31
Ducks	14502	13922
Cranes	511	5705
Rails, Coots, etc.	442	1727
Waders	1931	1961
Gulls, Terns	44	425
Totals	20239	32030

Comment:- 10,000+ ducks and 16,000 - 18,000 waders were observed in Nellore District this year. The huge concentration and observer-bird distance prevented correct identification of individual species. A more detailed article will be printed in the Society's journal MAYURA, subsequently.

* Dr Asad Rahmani, the Great Indian Bustard man of Bombay Natural History Society, was in the city on 22nd February and an impromptu meeting of the Society was called. About thirty members attended his very well made audio-visual presentation on the GIB in India, steps being taken to ascertain its survival in the wild and the problems being faced by scientists and governmental organisations in achieving these objectives. The 1500 - 2000 birds which survive in India today have to contend with rapid loss of habitat. Grassy plains which the bustard inhabits, are brought under cultivation at an incredibly fast rate by the exploding human population. Ironically, the bird is protected - but not its home! To counter this, state governments have created 8 sanctuaries in the country. Regarding future management priorities, Dr. Rahmani said that grassland plots of not less than 100 hectares should be developed in the distributional range of the bustard to allow undisturbed breeding grounds. Also an all-India project on the pattern of Project

Tiger should be evolved for the Great Indian Bustard.

* The Newsletter for Birdwatchers is a primary publication for birdwatchers. Edited by one of India's foremost conservationists, Zafar Futehally, it is now in its 28th year of publication. For a donation of Rs. 20/-, interested persons may subscribe to this bi-monthly. Write to Mr Zafar Futehally, Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers, 17/1 Victoria Road, BANGALORE - 560 047.

CHECKLIST

* The following is a checklist of birds seen in the Mahavir Harin Vanasthali, compiled from the Society's records.

S.No.	English Name	Scientific Name
1	Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii
2	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis
3	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta
4	Blackwinged Kite	Elanus caeruleus
5	Pariah Kite	Milvus migrans
6	Shikra	Accipiter badius
7	Longlegged Buzzard	Buteo rufinus
8	White-eyed Buzzard-Eagle	Butastur teesa
9	Tawny Eagle	Aquila rapax
10	Greater Spotted Eagle	Aquila clanga
11	Longbilled Vulture	Gyps indicus
12	Indian Whitebacked Vulture	Gyps bengalensis
13	Scavenger Vulture	Neophron percnopterus
14	Pale Harrier	Circus macrourus
15	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus
16	Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus
17	Short-toed Eagle	Circaetus gallicus
18	Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus
19	Painted Partridge	Francolinus pictus
20	Grey Partridge	Francolinus pondicerianus
21	Rain Quail	Coturnix coromandelica
22	Redwattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus
23	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus malabaricus
24	Stone Curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus
25	Blue Rock Pigeon	Columba livia
26	Ring Dove	Streptopelia decaocto
27	Red Turtle Dove	S. tranquebarica
28	Spotted Dove	Streptopelia chinensis
29	Little Brown Dove	Streptopelia senegalensis
30	Roseringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri
31	Pied Crested Cuckoo	Clamator jacobinus
32	Indian Hawk Cuckoo	Cuculus varius
33	Plaintive Cuckoo	Cacomantis passerinus
34	Koel	Eudynamys scolopacea
35	Small Greenbilled Malkoha	Rhopodytes viridirostris
36	Sirkeer Cuckoo	Taccocua leschenaultii
37	Crow-Pheasant	Centropus sinensis
38	Palm Swift	Cypsiurus parvus
39	Whitebreasted Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis
40	Bluetailed Bee Eater	Merops philippinus
41	Small Green Bee Eater	Merops orientalis
42	Indian Roller	Coracias benghalensis
43	Hoopoe	Upupa epops
44	Blackbacked Woodpecker	Chrysocolaptes festivus
45	Singing Bush Lark	Mirafra javanica
46	Redwinged Bush Lark	Mirafra erythroptera
47	Ashycrowned Finch-Lark	Eremopterix grisea
48	Short-toed Lark	Calandrella cinerea
49	Indian Small Skylark	Alauda gulgula
50	Swallow	Hirundo rustica

51	Wiretailed Swallow	Hirundo smithii
52	Redrumped Swallow	Hirundo daurica
53	Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor
54	Baybacked Shrike	Lanius vittatus
55	Rufousbacked Shrike	Lanius schach
56	Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus
57	Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus
58	Black Drongo	Dicrurus adsimilis
59	Whitebellied Drongo	Dicrurus caerulescens
60	Ashy Swallow-Shrike	Artamus fuscus
61	Greyheaded Myna	Sturnus malabaricus
62	Blackheaded Myna	Sturnus pagodarum
63	Rosy Pastor	Sturnus roseus
64	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis
65	Indian Tree Pie	Dendrocitta vagabunda
66	House Crow	Corvus splendens
67	Jungle Crow	Corvus macrorhynchos
68	Common Wood Shrike	Tephrodornis pondicerianus
69	Large Cuckoo-Shrike	Coracina novaehollandiae
70	Little Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus
71	Iora	Aegithina tiphia
72	Redvented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer
73	Whitebrowed Bulbul	Pycnonotus luteolus
74	Rufousbellied Babbler	Dumetia hyperythra
75	Yellow-eyed Babbler	Chrysomma sinense
76	Common Babbler	Turdoides caudatus
77	Large Grey Babbler	Turdoides malcolmi
78	Jungle Babbler	Turdoides striatus
79	Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa latirostris
80	Streaked Fantail Warbler	Cisticola juncidis
81	Franklin's Wren-Warbler	Prinia hodgsonii
82	Indian Wren-Warbler	Prinia subflava
83	Ashy Wren-Warbler	Prinia socialis
84	Tailor Bird	Orthotomus sutorius
85	Blyth's Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus dumetorum
86	Booted Warbler	Hippolais caligata
87	Orphean Warbler	Sylvia hortensis
88	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca
89	Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis
90	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros
91	Pied Bushchat	Saxicola caprata
92	Indian Robin	Saxicoloides fulicata
93	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis
94	Tickell's Flowerpecker	Dicaeum erythrorhynchos
95	Purplerumped Sunbird	Nectarinia zeylonica
96	Purple Sunbird	Nectarinia asiatica
97	Baya	Ploceus philippinus
98	Whitethroated Munia	Lonchura malabarica
99	Spotted Munia	Lonchura punctulata

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

17/4/2001

No.5

MAY 1988

EDITORIAL

Is it not frustrating in the field, many a time when you want to look up some identification pointers on that pipit, perched on a mound of upturned earth and, you are not able to find the 'pipits-page' in your field guide in a jiffy? Why just a pipit, this is the case with quite a few species - and almost all field guides! In a recent issue of BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST a reader has suggested a way out. He has thumb-indexed his field guides. With the guide closed, he has marked solid horizontal bars across the book's page edges, beginning from the left edge on the front of the field guide as you open it - to the page where the bird species is illustrated inside. Next he has written the name of the bird group above this bar! If you carefully divide the length of the guide into so many indices, you will be able to get in most of the groups easily. The result is quite satisfactory and effective. For ducks, just put your thumb to the end of the bar marked 'Ducks' and open the book. There you are!

PROGRAMME FOR MAY 1988

1) INDOOR MEETINGS :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.00 p.m.

i) 9th : M S Kulkarni will relate his experiences on his trip in March, to Periyar National Park and Mudumalai Sanctuary.

ii) 23rd : P Balu speaks on his recent tour of some north Indian states, on which he and a friend visited many sanctuaries and covered more than 4000 kilometers on a motorcycle!

2) FIELD TRIP :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

1) 29th : CHILKUR DEER PARK.

This field trip has been shifted to the end of the month purposely. The chairman suggested that at this time, members might see the monsoon bird (Pied Crested Cuckoo)! Chilkur is situated between the two reservoirs near Hyderabad - Osman Sagar and Himayat Sagar. This has some advantages for the birder in Chilkur. Besides being able to hit 3 birding areas with one trip (!), from within the deer park itself, an alert birdwatcher might see various water birds flying overhead! Though turning one's head skyward is necessary for this bird, grousing around is not, for this! The habitat is scrub jungle. It will be a half day trip.

NEWS

* In 1984, a cyclonic storm off the east coast of Andhra Pradesh had devastated the Nellapattu Bird Sanctuary. Siraj Taher said in his talk in April that he had witnessed that catastrophe but

was extremely glad and proud of the wonderful work that the state forest department had done to restore normalcy of habitat in this sanctuary. In Pulicat Bird Sanctuary he stated, the water had receded considerably this year. Even though species diversity in these two sanctuaries cannot be compared with Bharatpur, the sheer numbers of birds is beyond comprehension. Censusing is a nightmare! Among the clouds of waders he could identify only those feeding on the margins of the congregations. His most exciting sightings were of the rafts of Gullbilled and Caspian Terns. This talk was illustrated by slides taken by B C Choudhury on an earlier trip.

* In his talk on 25th April, Suhel Quader spoke of his visit to Narsapur Reserve Forest and the observations he made there. Most of his observations were around flowering Flame of the Forest and Red and Yellow Silk Cotton trees. On one Red Silk Cotton tree he observed 49 species of birds within the short span of 2 1/2 hours! Notable among which were the Crested Hawk-Eagle, Small Greenbilled Malkoha, both the Large Grey and Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrikes, a displaying Roller and Yellowthroated Sparrows. Near a small stream he saw a Grey Hornbill and Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers. He also saw a small species of deer which he could not exactly identify.

* In a recent news item, the Minister for Forests, Mr G Muddukrishnama Naidu stated that the A P government proposed to develop the Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisailem Sanctuary and the Venkateswara Sanctuary into national parks. He also said that the two reserve forest areas where the endangered Great Indian Bustard and Jerdon's Courser are found, Rollapadu and Lanka Malleswaram respectively - would be developed into Sanctuaries! (NEWSTIME 20-4-1988).

* Reducing bird numbers on airport runways:- A new approach to controlling avian traffic - long a major hazard at airports - is being tested by Japan's All-Nippon Airways. In a year-long experiment, the airline tried painting huge eyes on the turbines of 26 of its Boeing 747s and 767s. The result has been a dramatic decline in bird-aircraft collisions, with an average of only one strike per plane occurring with the test aircraft. (In contrast there was an average of nine strikes per aircraft on unpainted 747s and 22 strikes per aircraft on unpainted 767s.) Apparently the painted eyes deceive the birds into believing that the air-plane is a huge predator, causing them to disperse in fright. All-Nippon Airways now plans to have eyes painted on all its aircraft. (From INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE, The National Wildlife Federation.)

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Handwritten signature and date: 17/2/2001

No.6

JUNE 1988

EDITORIAL

The following is an instructive extract from Stuart Smith's (1945) 'How To Study Birds'. "An interesting exercise for the student is to construct charts showing the times of the year during which the different species of birds may be heard singing, at the same time noting weather conditions, wind, temperature and so on. There are many ways in which data for such charts may be collected, and for the observer who cannot make continuous observations there are several pitfalls to be avoided. Thus if one can only go out once a day at variable times in relation to sunrise and sunset, the results are obviously not going to have the significance of a similar set of data collected twice a day at fixed times in relation to sunrise and sunset. One observer chose two separate routes or walks, each of which took him about 25 min. to traverse. One was through an area with some cultivated land and gardens, the other taking him through a large wood. He divided the months into 3 equal periods of 10 days each and decided to do 6 counts on one route and 6 on the other for each 10 day period. For each of the two groups of 6 counts, three were done at 8 a.m. and 3 at 6 p.m. He thus got a dozen counts for each 10 day period, 6 on each of the 2 routes. His method of recording was to count the total numbers of each species heard singing during his walks. This gave him not only the distribution of song of any one particular species over a period of the year, but also a measure of the amount of that song. It also gives us a comparison of the amount of song in the morning compared with that in the evening."

PROGRAMME FOR JUNE 1988

1) INDOOR MEETINGS :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.00 p.m.

i) 13th : A slide show on the flora and fauna of Mahavir Harin Vanasthali, by Aasheesh Pittie.

ii) 27th : Surprise!

2) FIELD TRIP :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

1) 19th : RAJENDRANAGAR FOREST NURSERY.

Situated adjacent to the famous Kidwai Cottage, this quaint little place has given a lot of joy to birders in the past. Good for suburban forest and field birds! A half-day trip.

RECENT REPORTS

These are reports of recent bird sightings in Andhra Pradesh, which hold some topical interest, eg., early sightings/late departure of migrants, sightings of rare/abberant species, local migrants, etc.

1) Blackheaded Oriole on Yellow Silk Cotton in Narsapur Reserve

- 2) A pair of Pied Crested Cuckoos near the Miralam Tank, calling to each other - 3.5.1988 (B C Choudhury).
3) A Forest Wagtail in tangled undergrowth in Mahavir Harin Vanasthall - 1.5.1988 (Aasheesh Pittie).

NEWS

* The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 1988 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 12/5/88 - to provide for the constitution of central and state pollution control boards. Some important provisions are: the Central board will be empowered to exercise the powers of a state board, if the latter fails to act and comply with the directions issued by the former body. It will become obligatory on the part of a person to obtain the consent of the relevant board for establishing any industry, operation or process which is likely to cause pollution of water. The boards will also have authority to limit their consents for specified periods so as to enable them to monitor the compliance of the prescribed conditions. (NEWSTIME: 13/5/88.)

* In the 8th session of the State Wildlife Advisory Board, the forest minister announced that a proposal was ready to declare two more potentially good wildlife areas. Goondla Brahmeswaram Mitta in Kurnool Dist. would be an extension of the Nagarjuna Sagar - Srisaillam Tiger Reserve. The Gudem-Marripakala area in Vishakhapatnam lies in the Eastern Ghats with moist deciduous and semi-evergreen forest cover. This would be the only sanctuary in the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh. The third area is the Sri Lanka Malleswaram region in Cuddapah district where the Jerdon's Courser was sighted recently. He also said that the ban on shooting of all animals and birds, which has been in force from 1973, has been continued by the Government till December 1992. (INDIAN EXPRESS: 6/5/88.)

* Did you hear of the vampire-like activities of the Small Sharp-beaked Ground Finch (*Geospiza difficilis*)? In the 1980s a television camera team visited the remote Galapagos Islands where, on Wolf Island they found the bird drinking blood from holes which it had pecked in the wings of nesting Masked Boobies (*Sula dactylatra*), which do not seem particularly bothered by this. For their part, the finches not only gain extra food but also valuable moisture in the very arid environment. Normally seed eaters, the finches have also learnt to exploit the boobies by rolling their eggs away so that they crash apart on the rocks and provide further food! (WORLD BIRDS by Brian P. Martin).

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Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by
Aasheesh Pittie and P Balkoteshwar Rao.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

No.7

JULY 1988

EDITORIAL

We have prepared a sheet for the identification of the commoner egrets in the field. The distinguishing pointers have been taken from 3 to 4 field-guides, all of which might not be available to members. There are times when these common birds leave one with an uncomfortable kink in the neck. Members are requested to use this sheet with their Pictorial Guides (Ali & Ripley), for facility of identification and write back to us with suggestions, criticisms and guidelines. We plan to bring out similar sheets in future issues of the PITTA, for other bird groups like sandpipers, plovers, pipits, etc., commonly found in the Hyderabad environs.

PROGRAMME FOR JULY 1988

1) INDOOR MEETINGS :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 7.00 p.m.

i) 11th : Film show and discussion on the proposed 'ROOSTING SITES' project of the Society.

ii) 25th or 26th : Bakrid is on either of these days. On the day it is not, we meet!

2) FIELD TRIP :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 17th : RRL Campus or NIRD Campus.

NEWS

* The Society's field trip to Chilkur Deer Park on 29th May saw a handful of members brave it out on a hot and humid day. A pair of red-rumped swallows had constructed a "retort-shaped" nest on the window-sill of one of the observation huts. The 'uncommon' common babbler, a resident here, the rufous-bellied and the yellow-eyed babbler were notable species observed. Droppings of the Indian wolf were visible at frequent intervals on the outer trail. A flowering Albizzia amara impregnated the surrounding air with an hennaed aroma.

* About 23 members visited the Forest Nursery in Rajendranagar on 19th June. It was a pleasant, overcast day. A barred jungle owlet, spotted by Varaprasad, was the most notable avian sighting that day. The beginning of its haunting, eerie call was heard later. A redvented bulbul was seen carrying nesting material and a couple of black drongos had constructed a seemingly precarious nest on a bracket on a telegraph pole! A large tamarind tree was smothered in flowers and new leaf.

* The relatively better attended indoor meeting in May featured a talk by Mukund on his trip to Periyar. In June Aasheesh gave an AVP on the Mahavir Harin Vanasthali, emphasising the lesser

forms of life like small monsoonal ephemeral plants, smaller lizards, etc. Sarath also gave an AVP on his motorcycle tour with Balu - in Gujarat and Rajasthan. They visited Gir National Park where they saw a leopard, the Little Rann Sanctuary, famous for the wild ass and the Marine National Park. In Rajasthan they visited the Desert National Park and saw 4 indian bustards, to the envy of many a birder in the audience, and also Sariska Tiger Reserve where late at night, from a watchtower, they saw a male tiger quenching itself at a waterhole!

* NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRDWATCHER'S SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH WILL BE HELD ON 8TH AUGUST 1988, AT 6.30 P.M. IN THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS, ANDHRA PRADESH, A.P. FOREST DEPARTMENT, OPPOSITE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA, SAIFABAD, HYDERABAD. MEMBERS MAY PLEASE TREAT THIS AS AN INDIVIDUAL NOTICE AS PER RULE 24 OF THE BYE-LAWS OF THE SOCIETY.

* Under its bird-migration study programme, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has proposed establishing bird-ringing stations in Andhra Pradesh. The proposal is to have a permanent ringing station at Pulicat Lake and winter and summer ringing stations in the Eastern Ghats (Vizag area) and the Tirupati area. They also propose annual waterfowl counts throughout the state. It is very heartening to note that the state forest department has responded positively to this project. Initially the BNHS along with the AP Forest Dept., will conduct orientation/training camps at the above two places. They are both keen on involving local conservation oriented NGOs, universities, colleges and BNHS members. When this programme gets going, it will be a good opportunity for BSAP members to learn mist-netting, bird-banding and field identification techniques.

* The blacknecked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) seems to be disappearing at an alarming rate. In the Asian Waterfowl Census of 1987, just 32 blacknecked storks were reported from the whole of India. The population of this stork may not be so low, because all the wetlands of India were not surveyed - but the number is certainly too low to be overlooked. Hunting may not be the main cause of the decline, as it is not good to eat. There may be two main causes for the increasing rarity of this species; a) destruction of wetlands and b) trapping for zoos. Causes for its habitat destruction may be understood, but the fact that it is not in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, allows zoos to capture it without any hindrance. Bombay zoo has 6 birds, Lucknow, 13! The Hyderabad Zoo has 2 birds. Dr Asad R. Rahmani, Project Scientist, Endangered Birds Project, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shahid Bhagat Singh Rd., Bombay-400023 - is interested in data about this species including their numbers in zoos, from all over India.

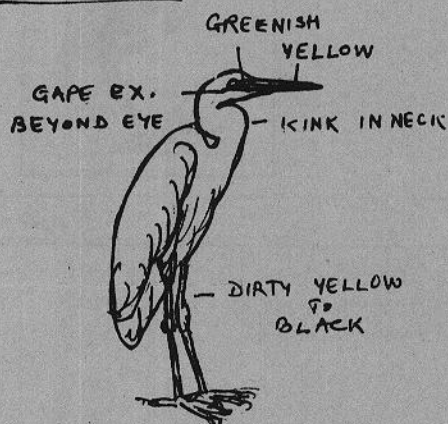
* Dr Kumar D. Ghorpade has proposed to compile a Directory & Guide of Indian Birdwatchers. This book will help birders contact colleagues or birding societies in different states for birdwatching information, trips, etc. Readers who are interested in having their names included in the Directory, may please write to Dr Ghorpade, P.O. Box 2564, 123 Brigade Rd., Bangalore 560 025, at their earliest. A few copies of the questionnaire are available with the Hon. Sec. of BSAP.

* Errata: In PITTA 6/88, the first item under RECENT REPORTS should read "Blackheaded Oriole on Yellow Silk Cotton in Narsapur Reserve Forest - 25.4.1988 (Suhel Quader)."

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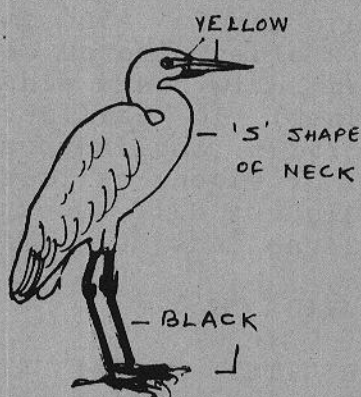
Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by
Aasheesh Pittie.

PLUMAGES:- NON-BREEDING
LARGE EGRET:-

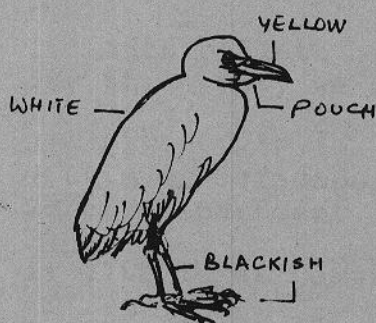


★ GENERALLY KINKED NECK

MEDIAN EGRET:-



CATTLE EGRET:-

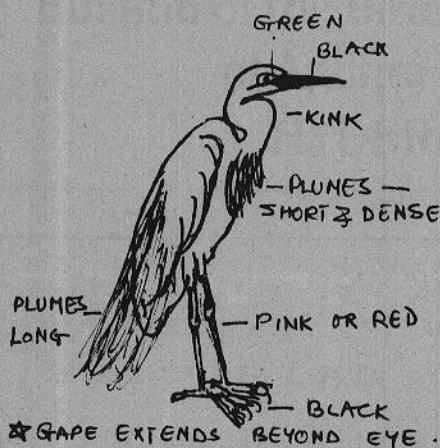


★ HUNCHED STANCE.
 ★ UPPER MANDIBLE DOWN-CURVED.
 ★ PUFFED THROAT.

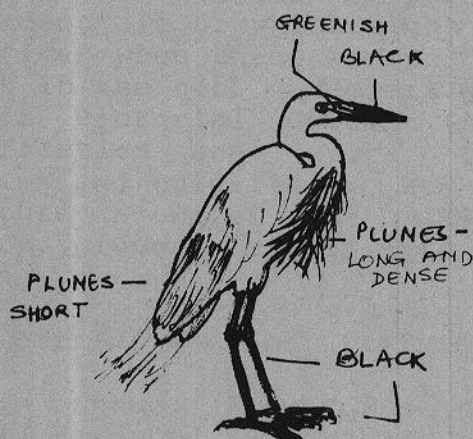
LITTLE EGRET:-



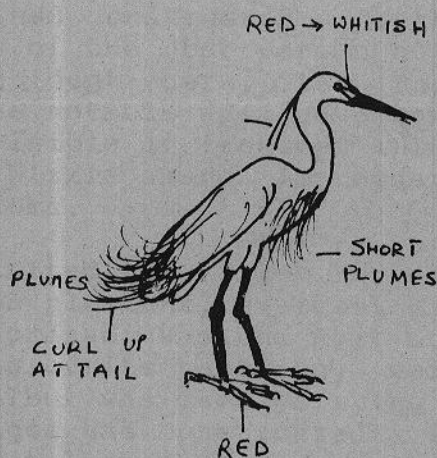
COURTSHIP



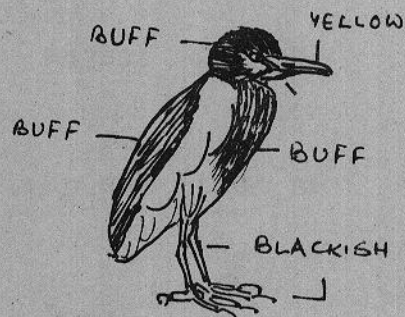
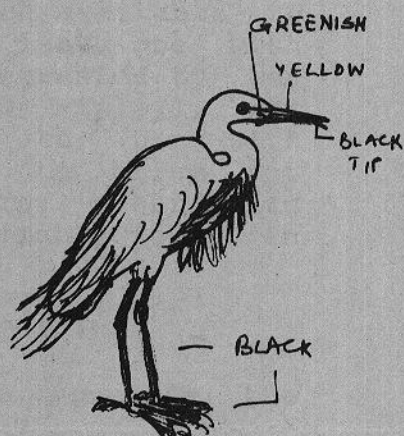
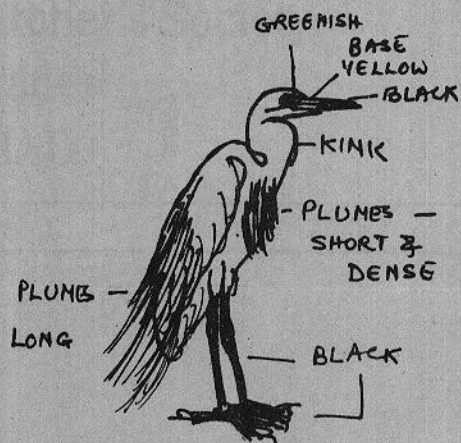
★ GAPE EXTENDS BEYOND EYE.



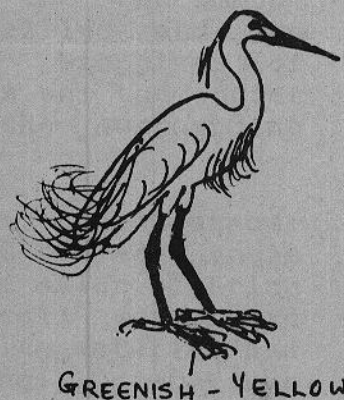
★ HUNCHED STANCE.



BREEDING



★ PUFFED THROAT.



Encl: with PITTA No 7 - July 1988



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

[Handwritten signature]

14/2/2001

No.8

August 1988

EDITORIAL

The relationship between birds and paper might seem a bit like the story of the house that Jack built. But I am convinced that conservation oriented organisations like ours and the members which comprise them, should be wise paper managers. Pause a moment and ponder on the paper you use everyday. How much of it could have been avoided? How much was unnecessary? In India, major paper mills use bamboo and wood (on an approximate 60:30 ratio) as raw material to manufacture paper. Birds need woods and bamboo too! The control of such wood/bamboo utilisation through the promotion and use of recycled paper would be a tremendous achievement for conservation-oriented bodies in India. As a beginning, we should print journals, bulletins, reports, etc., on either recycled paper or on paper manufactured from agricultural residues (like rice and wheat straw), cotton rags, hemp, jute cuttings, grass, etc. Small paper mills use 55% agricultural residues, 40% waste paper, 5% purchased pulp and also cotton liners and rags. Using both sides of a white sheet for typewritten documents, letters, memos, etc., will reduce paper consumption by 50% automatically. Rough work can be done on empty envelopes. Newspapers, magazines, publicity material, etc., should not be thrown away but sold to waste-paper dealers who re-sell them to paper-bag and paper-board manufacturers and paper recycling units. We reiterate that being PAPER WISE is supporting conservation and sowing seeds for environmental health. All of which helps make a better habitat for birds!

PROGRAMME FOR AUGUST 1988

1) INDOOR MEETINGS :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 7.00 p.m.

i) 8th : Film show and discussion on the proposed 'ROOSTING SITES' project of the Society.

ii) 22nd : ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING OF THE SOCIETY.

2) FIELD TRIP :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 14th : Mahavir Harin Vanasthali and Kothapet.

NEWS

* MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE THAT THE AGM OF THE BSAP, ANNOUNCED IN THE LAST BULLETIN TO BE HELD ON 18TH AUGUST, HAS BEEN POSTPONED TO 22nd AUGUST, THE VENUE AND TIMING REMAINING AS BEFORE. THIS MAY BE TREATED AS INDIVIDUAL NOTICE TO MEMBERS.

* Last month's bulletin carried news regarding Dr Ghorpade's DIRECTORY AND GUIDE FOR INDIAN BIRDWATCHERS. He had sent us a few copies of a questionnaire he wants birdwatchers to answer and return to him. Mr J V D Murthy has kindly cyclostyled this

questionnaire and we are able to send out a copy with this bulletin. Do fill and mail it to Dr Ghorpade.

* Members are familiar with the Asian Waterfowl Census conducted in India under the aegis of the BNHS and the IWRB in 1986 and 1987. Those members who have not yet participated in these censuses, but would like to, in the 1988 census, may write to S A Hussain, National Coordinator, Asian Waterfowl Counts, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay - 400023. The BNHS has also brought out a small booklet written by S A Hussain and Carl D'Silva, illustrating 78 species of waterfowl in colour, to aid identification in the field. It can be purchased for Rs. 10/- per copy (postage and packing extra) directly from the above address, or an order can be placed with the Hon. Sec. of the BSAP.

* "We had allowed tall wild grasses to grow up on land in front of our house, and as the seed heads matured, indigo buntings showed up to feed on them. We noticed that a single bunting would fly up to the top of a grass stem, then flutter back down, bending the stem to the ground as he descended. As he stood on the stem, he and other flock members fed on the seeds. The technique saved energy and allowed flock members to benefit from the efforts of an individual." (Lloyd Engdahl in BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST Jul/Aug 1987.)

* Did you know that AVADAVAT, another name of the Red Munia (*Estrilda amandava*) is a corruption of 'Ahmadabad'?! This bird was first taken to Europe from Ahmedabad (Gujarat). Van Twist (1648) writes, "The capital (of Guzerat) lies in the interior of the country and is named 'Hamed-Ewat' ie., the City of King Hamed who built it; nowadays they call it 'Amadavar' or AMADABAT." James Forbes (1813) states in his Oriental Memoirs (I;47) "...AMADAVATS, and other songsters are brought thither (Bombay) from Surat and different countries".

* Do birds use electromagnetism in flocking manouvres? West German zoologist Ulrich Warnke, of the University of Saarbrücken believes that if a flock must change direction within milliseconds, birds may communicate by means of electromagnetism. Acoustic signals are thought to take too long, and visual signals are improbable because not all the birds in a formation can see the leader, so researchers have decided to examine the possibility that electromagnetic signals coordinate flight plans. Since the signals travel at the speed of light, theoretically they would be able to reach all the birds in a flock at virtually the same time. The electromagnetic fields that have been detected in flocks of birds are believed to occur as a result of the electrostatic charging of each bird's body surface during flight. Warnke has proved the existence of these fields by using an oscillograph to measure electromagnetic fluctuations in flocks. He is convinced that there is a link between these fields and the birds' rapid coordination of flight manouvres. It now remains for scientists to discover how birds can detect and decode magnetic field changes. (BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST Jul/Aug 1987.)

* ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:- We are grateful to Maj A A Aziz for having met the printing cost of this bulletin and Mr DLN Rau for donating a whole bundle of paper which shall last for quite a few issues. Thanks are also due to Mr Tim Galbraith for donating journals of the Birdwatchers Society of Australia, with a promise to donate future issues too!

* Errata: In PITTA 7/88, in the 7th NEWS item, it was wrongly mentioned that the Hyderabad Zoo has 2 blacknecked storks, when actually it has 3.

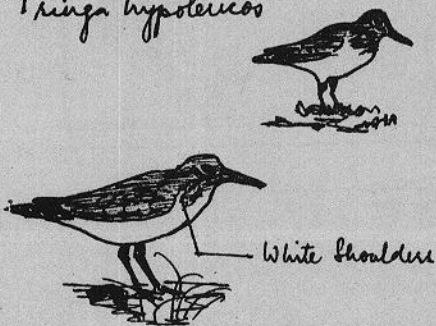
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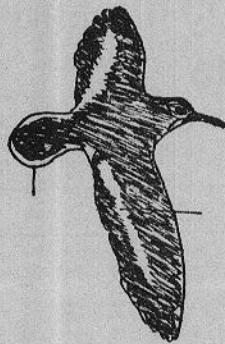
Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by
Aasheesh Pittie.

COMMON SANDPIPER:

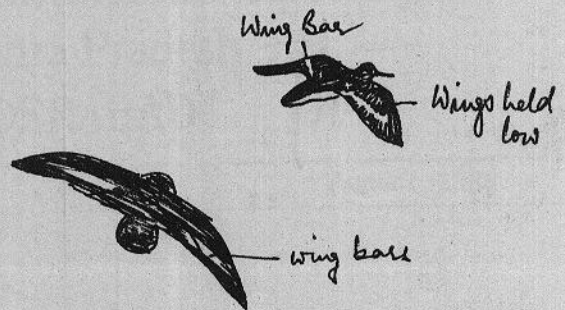
Tringa hypoleucos



- * Bobbing walk.
- * Forward bent stance.

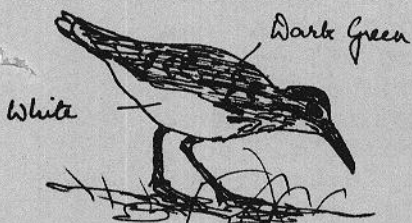


- * White Wingbar.
- * Whitish outer tail feathers.

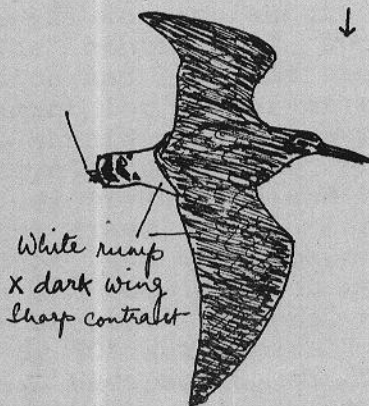


- * Flies on wings held low, alternately vibrating them and gliding - skimming over surface.

GREEN SANDPIPER:



- * Dark mantle contrasts with white belly.
- * Legs shorter than Spotted Sandpiper.

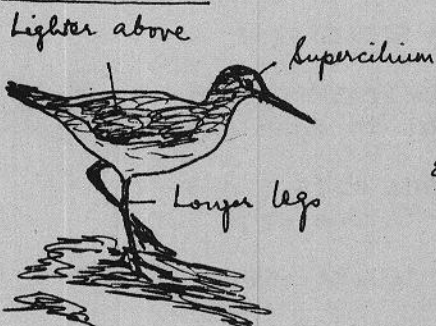


- * Floppy, snipe-like flight.
- * Legs do not project much beyond tail.



- * From below high contrast between white belly and dark under-wings.

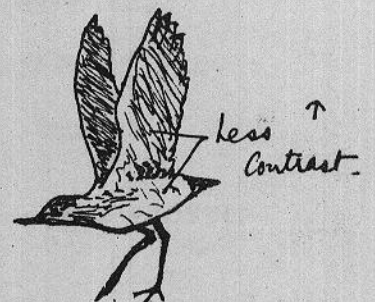
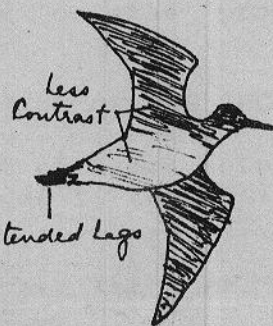
WOOD SANDPIPER:



- * Lighter mantle.
- * Longer legged.
- * Conspicuous supercilium.



- * Legs project well beyond tail.



- * Much paler under-wings than Green. Less contrast with belly.

ILLUSTRATIONS AFTER:- HAYMAN, et al, AND JOHNSON

BY:- SMRITI PITTIE & AASHEESH PITTIE.

REFERENCES:- 1). SHOREBIRDS: P. Hayman, J. Marchant and T. Prater.

2) BIRDS OF SEA & COAST: L. Johnson.

PITTA: Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of A.P. No. 8.. August 1988.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

Ind 17/2/2001

No. 9

September 1988

EDITORIAL

The Joy of Birding

Is that lump of earth which springs forth into the blue to lark on blurred wings and unfold a tale in such sweet a tenor that the world becomes music.

It is the arcing scythe of swifts, measuring immeasurable distances with mind boggling casualness, embodying mastery of mind and matter - bordering on true bliss. Or is it daredevilry?

It is the pure, sibilant gold pouring from darkening depths of closed foliage in dusk-y gardens - murmured, lisped, twittered. Like a promise of something intangible emerging from chasms beyond the comprehension of words like flycatcher or thrush.

It is the shivery, slippery, wet joy of sunbirds bathing in dew on leaves within that magical span of time known as dawn.

It is the "mya lit on your window-sill", the quarrelsome sparrow dust-bathing on the road side, the jaunty crow with all its pretensions.

It is something much more than tick-lists, names, rarities, life-birds, *Anthropoides virgo* and *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*. Simply stated it is

The Joy of Birding!

PROGRAMME FOR SEPTEMBER 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 7.00 p.m.

i) 12th : Discussions and a film show.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 4th : SHAMIRPET.

This will be a half day trip. Shamirpet has a small deer park and a lake which should be quite full now - as Hyderabad regions have had good rains. The army have got a permanent camp on one side of the lake, which has disturbed the waterfowl quite a bit. Greynecked Buntings are relatively rare species which can be seen here during the migration season, besides a horde of other avian delights!

ii) 18th : The destination is a surprise. We might go to an area from where the Great Indian Bustard has been reported a couple of years ago. Another half day trip!

NEWS

* The 6th Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 22/8/1988 at the CCF's Office, Forest Dept., Saifabad. The President, Mr Pushp Kumar and the Hon. Secretary, Mr Siraj Taher

addressed the gathering. The Hon. Treasurer, Mr M S Kulkarni presented a statement of accounts for 1986 and 1987. Mrs G S Plumber was made pro-tem president for election of members to the Committee for the 1988-89 year. The following are highlights of an open discussion after the committee was elected.

- In an effort to publicise the Society, Mr Tim Galbraith volunteered to print 1000 information/publicity brochures free of cost.

- On a proposal by Mr Bharat Bhushan, it was resolved to form an Advisory Committee for the BSAP.

The following were elected, by a show of hands, to the committee for the year 1988-89.

BSAP BOARD

PRESIDENT:	Mr Pushp Kumar IFS	Ph: 230561
VICE-PRESIDENTS:	Maj. A A Aziz	Ph: 520755
	Mrs G S Plumber	Ph: 232520
EX-OFFICIO:	Chief Wildlife Warden, Govt. of A. P.	
HON. SECRETARY:	Mr Siraj Taher	Ph: 37252
JT. HON. SECRETARY:	Mr Sushil Kapadia	Ph: 33834
HON. TREASURER:	Mr M S Kulkarni	Ph: 65205
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:	Mr Aasheesh Pittie	Ph: 43263
	Mr C Sarath	Ph: 35454
	Mr Tim Galbraith	Ph: 232982
	Mr Sudhir Rao	
	Mr P Kanniah	

* Biologists Charles R Brown and Mary B Brown, Yale University, have discovered that colonial cliff swallows not only lay eggs in other cliff swallow nests, but also transfer eggs between nests after the eggs are laid. "Egg transfers can occur at any time after an egg is laid and before it hatches and may represent a strategy by which an individual distributes its eggs in several nests to ensure some surviving offspring in the event of nesting failures. Sneaky transfer of eggs between nests represents a previously unknown form of reproductive parasitism in birds." In two instances a bird left its own nest with an intact egg between its mandibles and flew to a neighboring nest. In one case, the owner of the neighboring nest was not present, and the intruder entered, deposited the egg in the nest, and returned to its own nest. In another case one owner of a nest was present; a fight ensued when the intruder was evicted, but the egg remained in the nest. What might be the benefits of such egg transfer? "It might increase the chances of fledging at least some offspring in a risky environment. In their ancestral nesting habitat - rocky cliffs and canyons - cliff swallows are often affected by inclement weather and rock slides that can destroy many nests. Spreading a clutch of eggs around more than one nest could ensure against nesting failure." (From ECOLOGY, January 1988.)

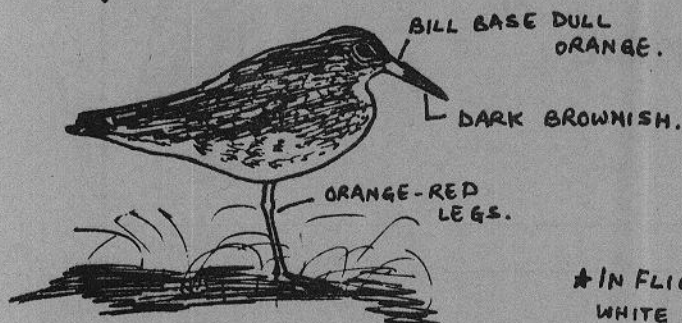
* Good news for Indian birders! Photophone India have come out with a pair of 8x35 power binoculars, which will be marketed shortly. Priced around Rs. 1200/- for a pair, they will be available to members of WWF-I at a discount. We hope to bring a sample piece for the members to use on one of our field trips this month!

*The sketches in PITTA No. 8 and also in this issue are of wintering birds in India. the scientific names (in the sketches with No. 8) of the Green and the Wood Sandpiper were inadvertently omitted. They are TRINGA OCHROPUS and TRINGA GLAREOLA respectively.

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REDSHANK:

Tringa totanus

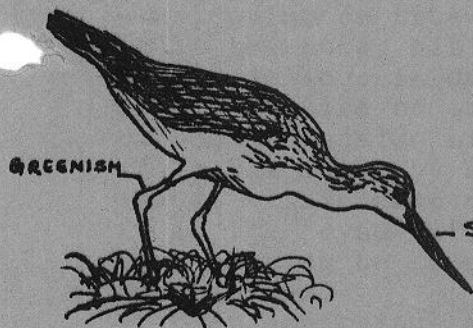


★ CLEAR WHITE EYE-RING (OFTEN).

★ CALL: BI-SYLLABIC.

GREENSHANK:

Tringa nebularia



★ WHITE BREAST

— STOUTISH, UPTURNED (SLIGHTLY) BILL.

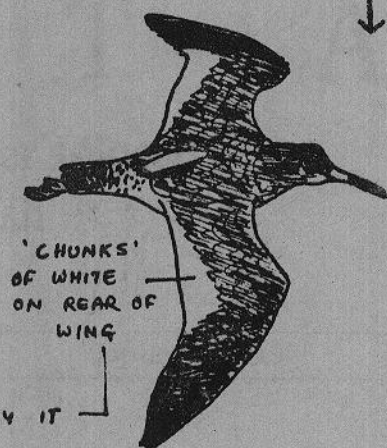
★ LARGER SIZE & STOUTER BUILD THAN MARSH SANDPIPER.



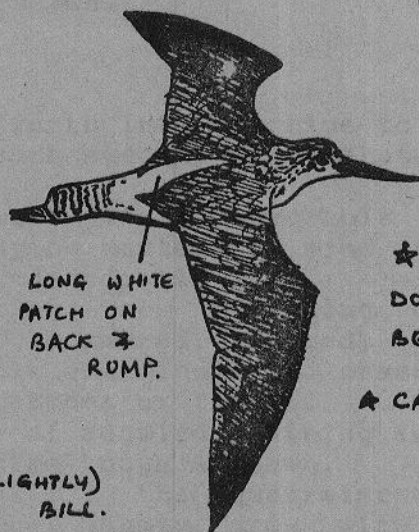
★ DUSKY PRIMARIES.

★ UNDERWING ALL WHITE.

★ IN FLIGHT ENTIRE WHITE SECONDARIES EASILY IDENTIFY IT



'CHUNKS' OF WHITE ON REAR OF WING



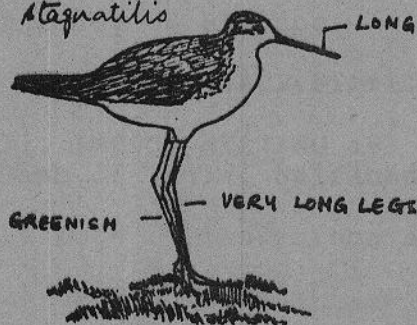
LONG WHITE PATCH ON BACK & RUMP.

★ IN FLIGHT THE LEGS DO NOT PROTRUDE MUCH BEYOND TAIL.

★ CALL: TRI-SYLLABIC.

MARSH SANDPIPER:

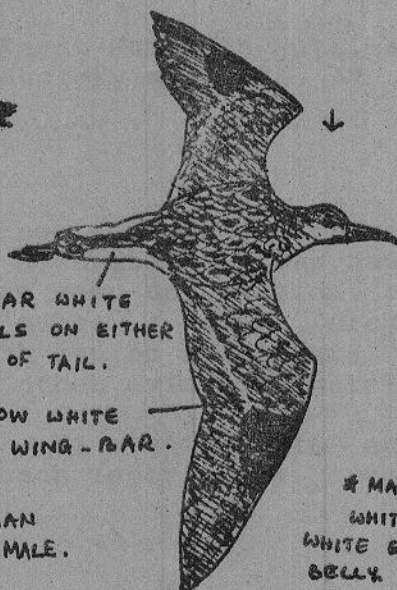
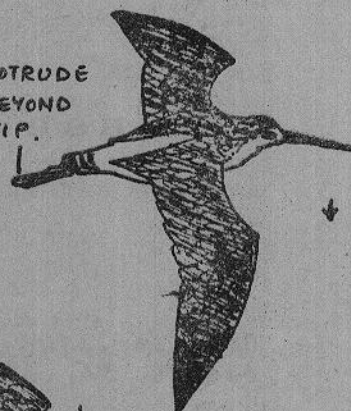
Tringa stagnatilis



— VERY LONG LEGS

★ DIFFERENTIATED FROM GREENSHANK BY BEING MARKEDLY LIGHTER IN COLOR, WITH MORE WHITES.

TOES PROTRUDE WELL BEYOND TAIL TIP.



CLEAR WHITE OVALS ON EITHER SIDE OF TAIL.

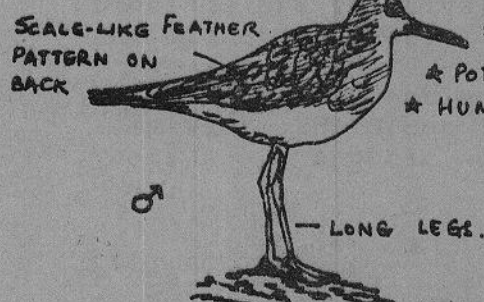
NARROW WHITE WING-BAR.



★ MANY ♂♂ IN WINTER HAVE WHITE HEADS. RARELY THE WHITE EXTENDS TO BACK & BELLY.

RUFF:

Philomachus pugnax



— LONG LEGS.

★ SMALL HEAD.
★ SHORTISH DECURVED BILL.
★ LONGISH NECK.

★ POT BELLY.
★ HUMP BACK.

★ MALE LARGER THAN FEMALE.

Illustrations After :- P. Hayman, J. Marchant & T. Prater (SHOREBIRDS: 1986: Croom Helm).

By: Sumit & Anshu Pittie.

End with :- PITTA Bull. of the Birdwatcher's Soc. of A.P. No. 9 Sept. 1988



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

Vol 13/2/2001

No.10

October, 1988.

EDITORIAL

Readers will recall the note in the July issue of PITTA regarding Asad Rahhmani's concern over the dwindling wild population of the Blacknecked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) in India. In a recent letter to the editor, he has enclosed some delightful news.

In an extremely quick and laudable follow-up of these reports, Mr Ranjitsinh, Jt. Sec. (W)., Dept. of Environment, has written to all state governments "It is....requested that Chief Wildlife Wardens may kindly issue instructions that this bird and its habitat may be given special attention and all possible attempts be made to safeguard both. Special attention needs also to be given to the preservation of the wetlands and to eliminate, and if that be not possible, to reduce to the maximum extent possible, competition with fishermen in wildlife sanctuaries. It would be appropriate if fishing is phased out in sanctuaries as soon as possible. Furthermore, an attempt may kindly be made to ascertain the present status and distribution of this bird....The Government of India is considering the upgradation of this bird from Schedule IV under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 to Schedule I. Meanwhile, it is requested that no permission may kindly be given for the capture of this bird."

PROGRAMME FOR OCTOBER 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 7.00 p.m.

i) 17th : With quite a few new members joining the BSAP, we think it appropriate to speak about the art of birding. Sushil Kapadia speaks "On Birding".

ii) 31st : Talk by Bharadwaj "Impressions of a 'new' birder". Followed by a film show.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

1) 9th : IBRAHIMPATNAM.

This will be a half day trip.

ii) 23rd : ANANGALU LAKE : MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT.

We will visit a new area on this day. Members are requested to carry lunch as the trip will be a full day outing.

NEWS

* The turnout of members on the Shamirpet trip was excellent, with at least 4 participants coming for the first time. The lake is full. In fact, the water-spread has covered large areas all around

and on the opposite shore is reaching the crowns of several babool trees! No waterfowl were seen except for some grey herons. Members were confined to the deer park and could not explore the lake shores because of the water-spread. The surprise-trip was to Chevella, where members found definite evidence of the occurrence of the great indian bustard. They also discovered that the "Betameka Pakshi" of Kurnool is known here as the "Peddedu Pitta!". Villagers identified the bird from the illustrations on the 'bustard' page of the Pictorial Guide. One person even identified the bird in flight! Maybe, more frequent visits will yield bustards as the habitat is ideal for them!

* The cause of conservation suffered a severe loss in the death of Lt. Col. Dr. Fatesinghrao P. Gaekwad of Baroda, President of WWF-India, in Bombay on 1st Sept. 1988. He was a Trustee of the WWF-International for 6 years, and the Founding Trustee and President of WWF-India. He also held important offices in a number of conservation related organisations such as the Indian Board for Wildlife, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, World Council for the Biosphere, Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds, the ICF, the World Pheasant Association-India, the Otter Trust and the Snow Leopard Trust. He took a keen interest in the Conservation Education Programme of WWF-India.

* Sometimes, rediscovering a bird species might not be as difficult as the Jerdon's Coursers' story was. Hear this one of the Kirtland's Warbler, which has a population of just 400-450 birds in the wild. During the early 1900s, 28 Ohio (USA) sightings were recorded. In May of 1954 a bird hit the Perry Monument on South Bass Island in Lake Erie, fell toward the ground, and struck Dr. Milton Trautman in the head. Dr. Trautman picked up the bird and put it in his pocket. On returning home to process several other birds that he had collected that day for their skins, he realised that the bird that had hit him was a rare Kirtland's Warbler! (Birdwatcher's Digest May/June 1988 Vol 10/5/54).

* The binocular pair, announced in the last PITTA, have arrived and will be available on the 9th for inspection by members. This has been possible through the office of the WWF-India in Hyderabad. The glasses are priced at Rs. 1250/-, but WWF-India members get them at a discounted price of Rs. 1100/-!

* A PLURALITY OF BIRDS:-

- a siege of herons or bitterns.
- a plump of wildfowl.
- a spring of teal.
- a company of widgeon.
- a cast of hawks.
- a bevy of quail.
- a covey of partridges.
- a muster of peacocks.
- a covert of coots.
- a congregation of plovers.
- a desert of lapwings.
- a wisp of snipe.
- a flight of doves or swallows.
- a murmuration of starlings.
- an exaltation of larks.
- a host of sparrows.

(The Birds: Life Nature Library. Time-Life Books.)

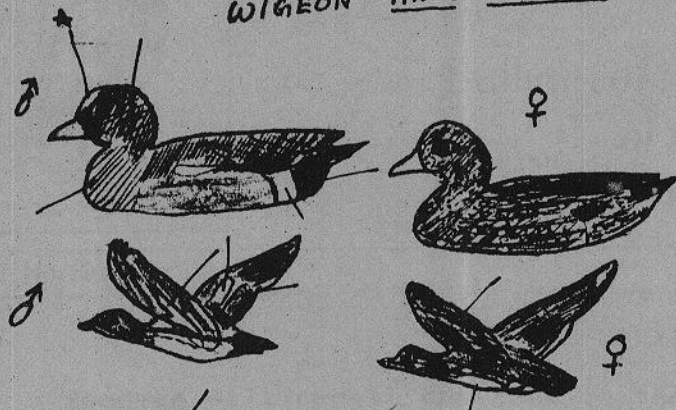
This issue is printed on paper made from agricultural residues.

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Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by Aasheesh Pittie.

MIGRANT - DABBLING DUCKS

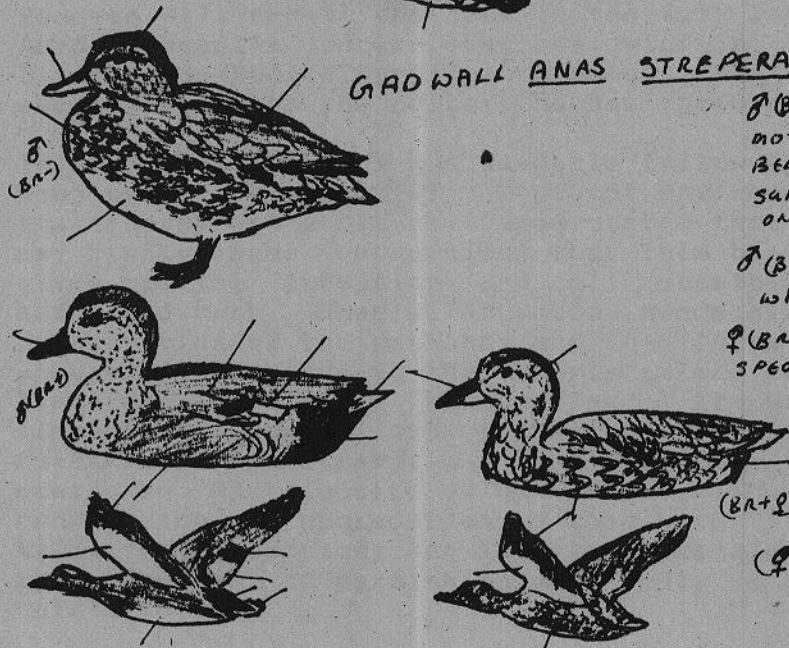
WIGEON ANAS PENELOPE



INDEX: ♂ = male
♀ = female
FL = in flight
BR+ = in breeding
BR- = non-breeding

- ♂ BRACKWHITE VENTRAL REGIONS
PINK BREAST CHESTNUT HEAD
★ YELLOW FOREHEAD.
- ♀ PLAIN UN-MOTTLED WHITE BELLY
UNDERWING GREY
- ♂ (FL) WHITISH WINGBAR WING GREY
UPPER WING WITH WHITE AND GREEN.

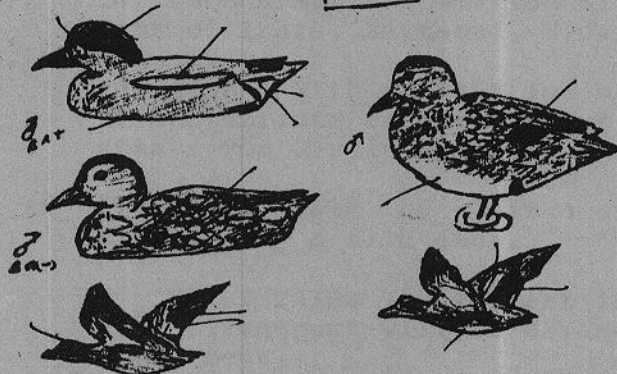
GRADWALL ANAS STREPERA



- ♂ (BR-) GREYER THAN (BR+) ♀ HEAVILY
MOTTLED. BREAST & FLANKS WHITE
BELLY. BACK GREY HEAD WITH WHITISH
SPECULUM. BILL DARK WITH ORANGE
ON SIDES.
- ♂ (BR-) GREY BODY WITH BLACK REAR.
WHITE SPECULUM & TAIL DARK BILL
- ♀ (BR+) BILL DARK WITH ORANGE ON SHOES
SPECULUM ABSENT OR PARTLY DEVELOPED.
- ♂ (FL) GREY BODY, GREY PRIMARIES &
SECONDARIES. WHITE FOREWING
DARK RUMP WHITE TAIL.
- (BR+) ♀ UPPER WING GREY WITH WHITE
BLACK PATCHES.
- ♀ SCALLOPED & MOTTLED BREAST &
BELLY, WHITE UNDER WING (FORE)
GREYER PRIMARIES. SPECULUM
VERY INDISTINCT.

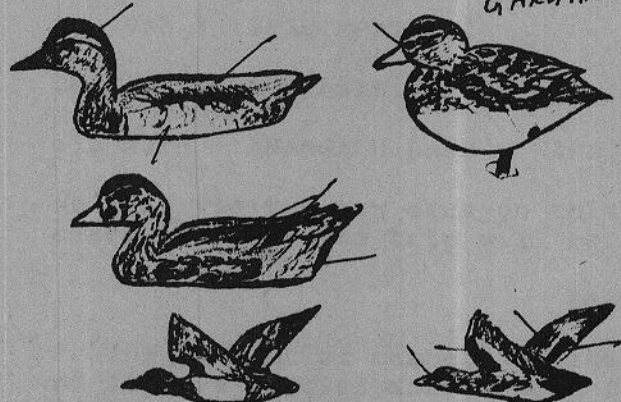
COMMON TEAL

ANAS CRECCA.



- ♂ (BR+) GREY BODY - WHITE SPECULUM
YELLOW PATCH ON RUMP - CHESTNUT
HEAD GREEN EYE MASK
- ♂ (BR-) MUCH DARKER AND DULLER
COLORED BIRD. WITH NO EYE STRIPE
- ♀ HEAD PLAIN, LACKS PALL FOREWING
AND HAS A GREEN SPECULUM.
WHITE BELLY
- ♂ (FL) CHESTNUT GREEN HEAD - GREEN SPECULUM.
WHITE UNDERWING
- ♀ (FL) GREEN SPECULUM WHITE WINGBAR
WHITE BELLY.

GARGANEY ANAS QUERQUEDULA.



- ♂ (BR+) DARK HEAD WHITE SPECULUM WHITE
BELLY GREY BACK WITH GREEN SPECULUM
AND BLUE FOREWING.
- ♂ (BR-) HEAD DUNKER - WHITISH LORAL SPOT
BELLY WHITE.
- ♀ STRONG PATTERNS ON HEAD - BELLY WHITE.
- ♂ (FL) UPPER WING PALE GREY WHITE BELLY
FLANKS BLUE SPECULUM.
- ♀ (FL) DULL SPECULUM - WHITE TRAILING EDGES OF WING.
WHITE BELLY.

ILLUSTRATIONS AFTER STEVE MADAGOC HILARY BURN [WILD FOWL - AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE -
BY - RAJEEV MATHAW. CHRISTOPHER HEALM - 1988]

PITA No 10 Oct 1988



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

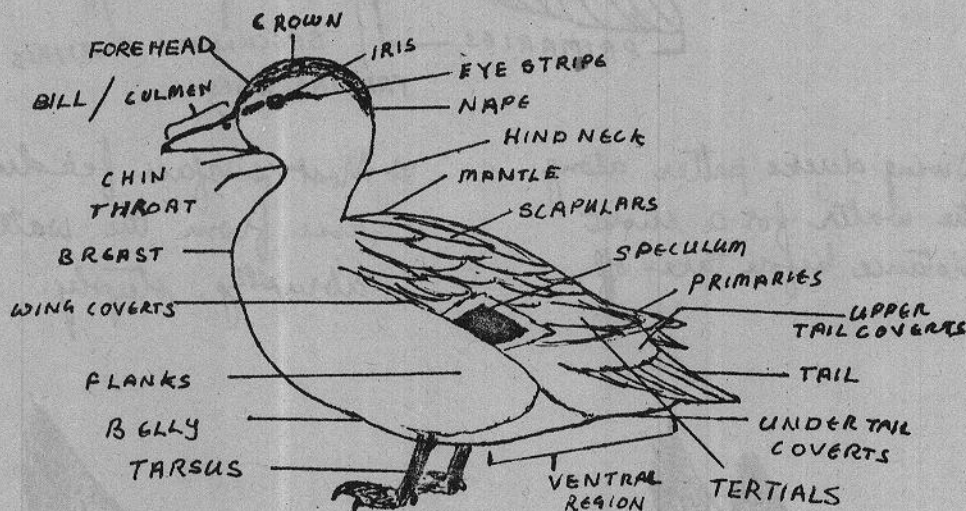
Handwritten signature and 13/4/2001

No.11

NOVEMBER 1988

EDITORIAL

Since we began illustrating the PITTA with outline sketches for easier field identification - many members have come forward with raised superciliums, enquiring the meaning of words like 'carpal joint' and 'speculum'. It should have been our primary goal to prevent such speculation. Having underestimated the importance of bird-topography initially, we try with this issue to clear some doubts. Of course, the more one learns, the more one wants to learn. And who can question the birder who speaks of wing bars and tertials? None can dig him in the flanks. With these illustrations we hope you are able to take that distant dab of brown and white by its hindneck or nape, mantle or flank, chin or throat and haul it onto your notebooks. No covert glances please. Lets go and hurdle the eye-stripe!!



PROGRAMME FOR NOVEMBER 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 7.00 p.m.

i) 15th : The programme will be intimated on the field trip of the 13th.

ii) 28th : Film show.

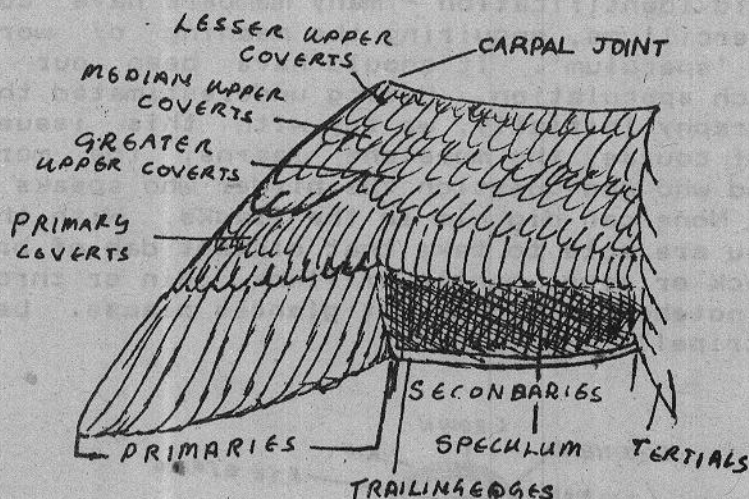
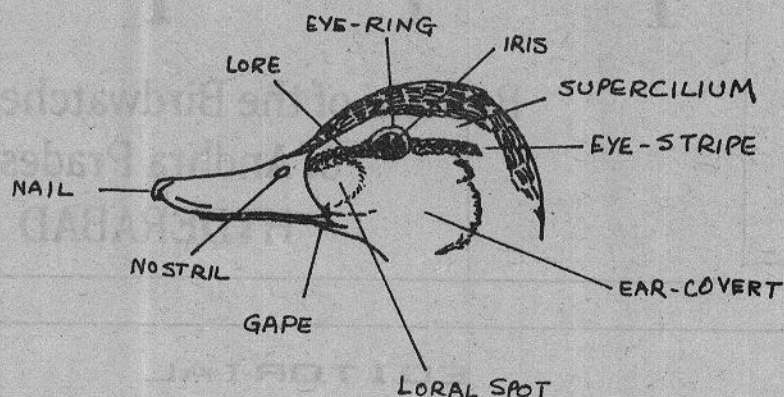
2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 13th : A half day trip to MAHAVIR HARIN VANASTHALI.

ii) 20TH : AMANGALU LAKE : MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT.

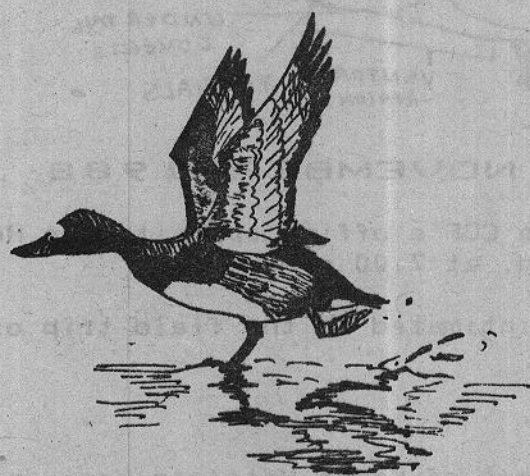
As this trip was cancelled last month, we will visit the lake on this day. Members are requested to carry lunch as the trip will be a full day outing.

DUCK MAKE-UP BY A QUACK



★ Diving ducks patter along the water for a short distance before take-off.

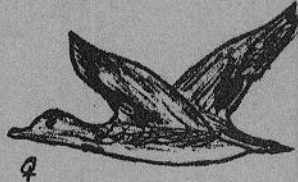
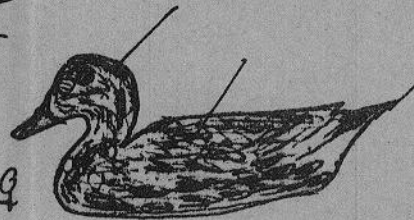
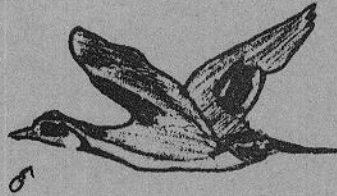
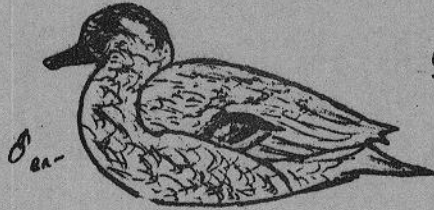
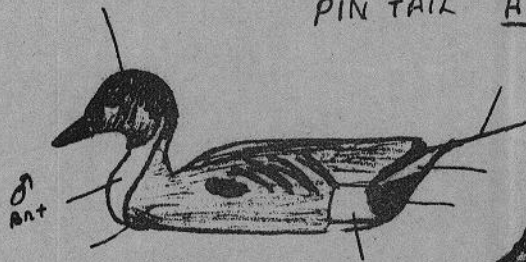
★ Most surface feeding ducks rise from the water abruptly, steeply.



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Pittie.

PIN TAIL ANAS ACUTA.

MIGRANT DUCKS.



♂ (BR) WHITE BREAST - DARK BROWN HEAD, GREY BODY, DARK REAR AND LONG TAIL.

♂ (BR-) GREYER THAN ♀ WITH WING OF THE ♀ AT M.

♀ MOTTLED & SCALLOPED BREAST AND FLANKS, POINTED TAIL, WHITISH BELLY.

♂ (FL) DARK BROWN HEAD, WHITE THROAT, BREAST & BELLY. LONG TAIL, BLACK VENTRALS, GREY BODY, GREEN SPECULUM.

♀ (FL) GREY UNDERWING, GREEN SPECULUM, REST AS ♀.

SHOVELER ANAS CLYPEATA



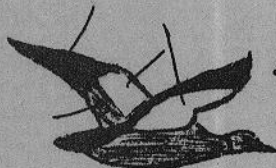
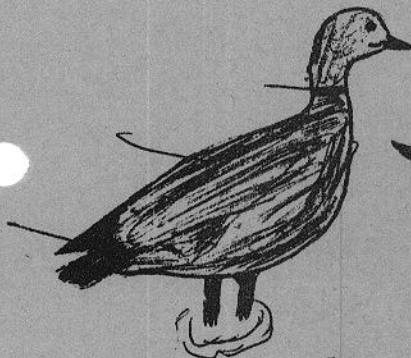
♂ HUGE BILL - DARK HEAD, WHITE BREAST, CHESTNUT FLANKS.

♀ MOTTLED FLANKS, HUGE BILL.

♂ (FL) HUGE BILL, DARK HEAD, CHESTNUT FLANKS, WHITE ON UNDERWING (FORE), BLUE UPPER FOREWING.

♀ MOTTLED APPEARANCE - WHITE UNDERWING, HUGE BILL.

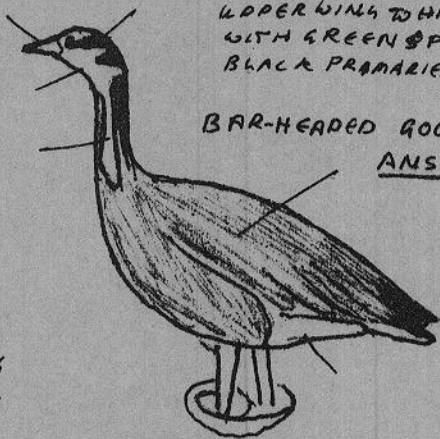
BRAMMING DUCK TADORNIA FERRUGINEA



♂ ♀ AMOOSE SIZED AND SHAPED DUCK - BLACK LEGS, CINNAMON LIVERED. ♂ HAS DARK COLLAR. BLACK TAIL & PRIMARIES IN BOTH SEXES.

♂ ♀ (FL) CINNAMON BODY CONTRASTING WITH WHITE FOREWING AND DARK PRIMARIES & SECONDARIES. UPPER WING TO WHITE FOREWING WITH GREEN SPECULUM AND BLACK PRIMARIES.

BAR-HEADED GOOSE ANSER INDICUS



♂ ♀ YELLOW BILL, WHITE FACE, GREY BODY, TWO BARS ON HEAD, WHITE VENTRALS.

♂ ♀ (FL) GREY BODY - WHITE FACE, WHITE VENTRALS, GREY FOREWING, DARKER PRIMARIES & SECONDARIES.



ILLUSTRATIONS AFTER:-
STEVE MADGE & HILARY BURN

[WILD FOWL - AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE]
CHRISTOPHER HELM 1988

85 RAJEEV MATHEW.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

[Signature]

Ind 17/2/2001

No.12

DECEMBER 1988

EDITORIAL

"My start as a behavior watcher began in no dramatic way. I knew that I wanted to learn more from the wonderful countryside where we lived in Shamirpet, and I knew that I must originate some systematic way of doing so. Descartes advised anyone undertaking a new enterprise to begin with what is simplest and easiest, and that is what I did in the early 1950s. Whenever I took a walk or went anywhere, I began observing with the first birds I met. Even if I encountered no more than a few 'bulbuls', I followed them to see how much I could learn before they became 'lost from view. WATCHING EVERYTHING, I said to myself: birds foraging, flocking with other birds, preening, scratching. My system worked from the beginning. I could count on coming home with something learned, something to write in my notes, something to read about, every time I went out. I arranged my notes under families, bulbuls under Pycnonotidae and crows under Corvidae, etc. In the dead of winter as well as in summer, and whether my walk was for a half-hour or two hours, my practice was the same. No matter how many experts may have reported on how babblers move through the woods, I decided I must see and discover everything for myself. There is, I quickly found, magic in seeing for oneself. At the same time I started reading up on each bird that I had observed at any length. Observing makes reading mean more, and reading, when it generates ideas, makes you a better observer."

(Lawrence Kilham in BWD 10/6/76. Changes in bird and place names are the editor's.)

PROGRAMME FOR DECEMBER 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 7.00 p.m.

i) 12th : Group discussion and working strategies for the forthcoming Asian Waterfowl Census.

ii) 26th : Film show and talk.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 4th : Nehru Zoological Park.

ii) 18th : NARSAPUR RESERVE FOREST, Medak District.

This will be a full day trip and members are requested to carry lunch.

NEWS

* On 13th November, members visited the Mahavir Harin Vanasthali.

A total of 40 species of birds were recorded on a walk along the track inside the park. The migrant species seen were Redstart, Orphean Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Kestrel, Blackeared Kite, Blyth's Reed Warbler and a Sparrowhawk, overhead. (This last bird has also been reported recently from the Jubilee Hills area in the city, by Humayun Taher and Suhail Quader.) Two or three types of LBJs (little brown jobs) or migrant warblers of the genus *Phylloscopus* and *Hippolais*, were seen, but identification was not pinpointed. Members were also taken around the Environmental Education Centre, which was to be inaugurated the next day, by officials of the forest dept. This centre has excellent facilities for the interested naturalist, with a very well stocked library and reading room, a nature interpretation hall with panoramic windows for watching wildlife within the park and, a hall for screening films on wildlife, with video and projection facility.

* The second field trip of the Society was on the 20th Nov. to Amangalu Tank in Mehboobnagar dist. On the way, we birded inside the Ramanutala Forest Nursery - and were we lucky! Though eucalyptus trees have been planted plentifully, there are some beautiful old tamarind trees still surviving. And around these we saw the Grey Tit and the Lesser Whitethroat. We were also enthralled by the Little Minivet and the Redbreasted Flycatcher. Nearby, in some bushes on rocks, was a Black Redstart, tail a-shiver. Amangalu Tank was a disappointment as the variety of birds seen was very less. But the lunch was a treat and with a thanks to the DFO, Mr Govind Rao, we returned to the city.

* Members will be glad to know that the Oriental Bird Club (OBC) has agreed to exchange its Bulletin and Journal (FORKTAIL) with the Society's bulletin (PITTA) and newsletter (MAYURA). The OBC aims to encourage an interest in the birds of the Oriental Region and their conservation; to liaise with, and promote the work of, existing regional societies and to collate and publish material on Oriental birds. The latest Bulletin (No. 8) of the OBC carries a small information note about the BSAP. Members can borrow a copy from the Hon. Sec. for perusal.

* Two members of the BSAP, C R Sarath and B Dasarathy, helped the Centre for Environmental Concerns, Secunderabad, in their Nature Education Follow-up Camp for 10th and 11th classes - as guides for a natural history and birdwatching trek to Aushapur Village near here. Members of the BSAP were also instrumental in helping organise and conduct nature and birding treks for the members of the SONACO Young Naturalists Club (comprised of school children), at Chilkur Deer Park.

* C R Sarath and P Balkoteshwar Rao, report sighting Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) along the Mananur-Srisailem road, on the 8th and 9th of October 1988. The present known range of this species in the south is upto the Godavary River, south of which only the Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) is found.

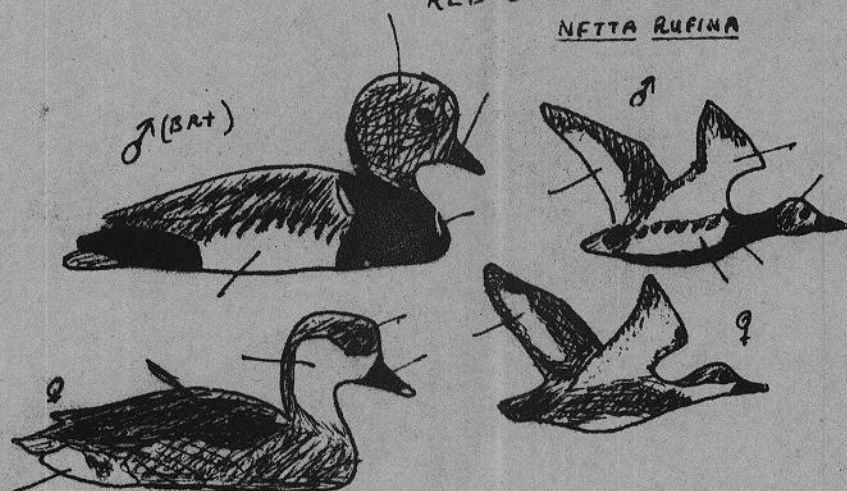
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Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by Aasheesh Pittle.

DIVING DUCKS.

RED CRESTED POCHARD NETTA RUFINA



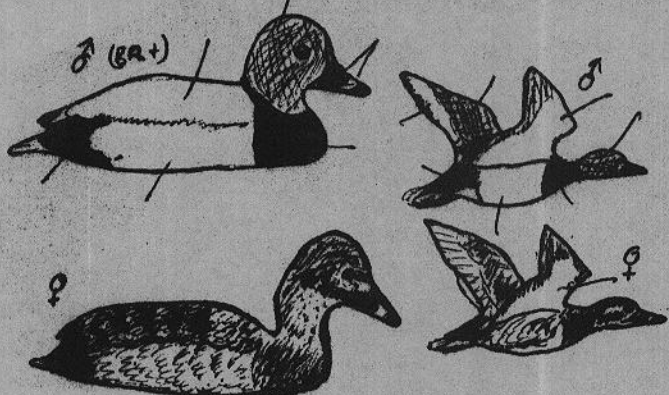
♂ (BAT) RUFOUS HEAD - RED BILL
BLACK BREAST AND RUMP
WHITE FLANKS

♂ (FL) SAME AS ABOVE WITH
WHITE UNDERWINGS AND WHITE
HIND WING.

♂ (BR-) SIMILAR TO FEMALE BUT
BILL RED.

♀ WHITE LORES - CHEEKS AND
FORE NECK WHITE RUMP AND
BELLY. OTHERWISE BODY COLOR
BUFF BILL DARK GREY, ORANGE-
TIPPED.

COMMON POCHARD AYTHYA FERINA



♂ (BAT) CHESTNUT HEAD AND NECK
BILL BLACK WITH BLUE SADDLE
WHITE WINGS AND FLANKS.

♂ (BR-) ALMOST SIMILAR TO ♀
BUT HEAD AND NECK AS IN (BAT ♂)

♂ (FL) RUFOUS NECK & HEAD. BLACK BREAST.
WHITE UNDERWING - GREY UPPERWING
WITH PALER HINDWING.

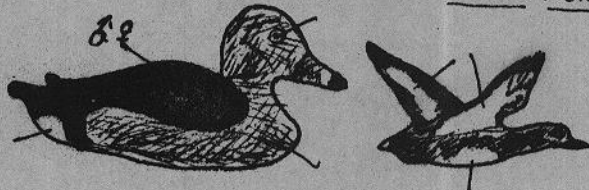
♀ DRAB BROWN WITH WHITE EDGES ON
SCAPULARS AND BREAST FLANKS.

♀ (FL) SIMILAR BUT WITH WHITISH UNDERWING.

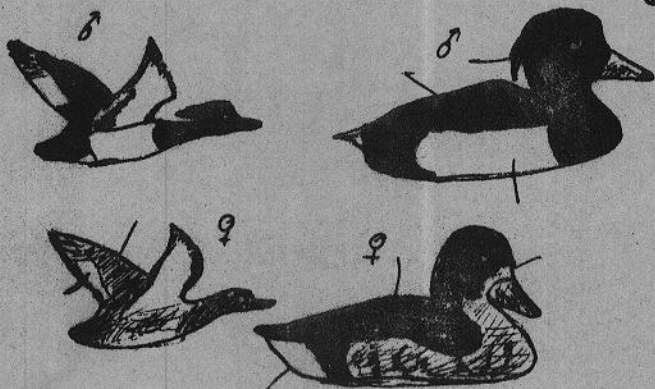
♂ ♀ WHITE EYES ONLY IN ♂. CHESTNUT BROWN UPPER
PARTS RUDDY FLANKS FACE & BREAST WHITE RUMP.

♂ ♀ (EL) DARK FOREWING (ARM) CONTRASTING WITH
HINDER WHITE - CHESTNUT (RUDDY) BODY WHITE BELLY

WHITE-EYED POCHARD AYTHYA NYROCA



TUFTED DUCK. AYTHYA FULIGULA



(BAT) ♂ A PIED DUCK WITH A TUFT ON THE HEAD

♂ (BR-) SAME AS ABOVE BUT WITH DIRTY
WHITE FLANKS.

♂ (FL) UNMISTAKEABLE BLACK & WHITE DUCK

♀ DARK BROWN DORSALLY RUSTY BROWN
BELOW WITH OR WITHOUT WHITE ON RUMP
AND/OR WHITE ON FACE.

♀ (FL) DARK NECK AND HEAD CONTRASTING WITH
LIGHTER FLANKS AND WHITE BELLY.
DARK BROWN FOREWING WITH WHITE SPECIUM.

ENCL. WITH:- PITTA: Bull. of the BSAP. No. 12 Dec 1988.

ILLUSTRATIONS AFTER: STEVE MADGE & HILARY BURN
BY RAJEEV MATHEW.

WILDFOWL - AN IDENTIFICATION
GUIDE - CHRISTOPHER HELM
1988



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Ind H 2/2001
JANUARY 1989

No. 13

EDITORIAL

HINTS FOR COUNTS

Here is a simple step-by-step procedure for counting waterfowl. This is primarily meant for beginners. We are sure even our seasoned and advanced level birdwatchers will find it useful sometimes.

Select a vantage point near a wetland from where you can see the entire area fairly easily. Sit or stand comfortably and start counting.

1. COUNTALL:- Count all the birds present in the wetland whether you can identify them or not. Note the number down on a blank sheet of paper.

2. COUNTWHICH:- Now distinguish these birds by their general appearance. eg., ducks, geese, herons, egrets, storks, sandpipers, etc. Begin from the largest and easily seen and continue till you have accounted for all. Note down the numbers of each category.

3. WHICHOFWHICH:- Now try to distinguish between similar type of birds. eg., large egret, median egret, little egret, etc., and go on to other types and count the individual types, note these down.

4. WHATOFWHICH:- If the males and females are dissimilar, try and count them separately. The males in full plumage are easy to identify but the problem arises when you are looking at females or "off colour" males. Even competent birdwatchers find it tough. Try with the help of waterfowl booklet.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE:-

Site : Panvel Tank
Nearby city : Bombay
Date : 11 January 1988
Coverage : 100%
Compiler : S.A.

1. COUNTALL	:	Total 999 birds	
2. COUNTWHICH	:	Herons . 58	Egrets 244
		Waterhens 159	Cormorants 38
		Jacanas 18	Ducks 545
		Unidentified	28
3. WHICHOFWHICH	:	Herons	Purple- 7
			Pond 46
			Not sure 5
		Egrets	Large 30
			Median 6
			Little 80
			Cattle 106
			Not sure 22
		Waterhens	Whitebreasted 27
			Purple moorhen 88

	Moorhen	44
Cormorants	Large	33
	Little	5
Jacanas	Bronzewinged	11
	Pheasanttailed	7
Ducks	Dabchick(*)	18
	Cotton teal	45
	Whistling teal	234
	Teal	128
	Spotbill	7
	Nakta	11
	Not sure(*)	11
Unidentified		<u>28</u>
		<u>999</u>

(*) Not a duck anyway.

(*) Look sharp. These may be village ducks out to have a good time at the pond!

NOTE:- Birds will not know that they should sit still while they are being counted therefore make allowances for moving birds while counting.

(courtesy: WETLANDS AND WATERFOWL NEWSLETTER Vol 1. Aug. 1988)

1989 COUNT DATES ARE 8TH AND 15TH JANUARY.

(NOTE TO PARTICIPANT-MEMBERS OF THE B.S.A.P.)

Please make it a point to count on either one of the dates mentioned above. If you wish to count on both the dates please choose a different wetland - after making sure that other volunteers are not duplicating the same. Consult the Hon. Sec., Mr Siraj Taher.

Please return all COUNT FORMS to Mr Siraj Taher so that he can send all together to the BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

If you are not sure of the identification of any bird/s please do not resort to guess work. It is better in such cases, if you just record the number (eg., 52 ducks, 23 waders, etc.).

Please do keep additional notes and general information about the wetlands and waterfowl in your area. Important and significant information/article/notes will be considered for publication in the WETLANDS AND WATERFOWL NEWSLETTER of the BNHS.

PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY 1989

1) INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:45 p.m.

i) 16th : Talk by S. K. Balachander on Mangroves ecosystems.

ii) 30th : Talk by Dr. Aminuddin Khan on a recent trip to Kerala.

2) FIELD TRIPS:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A P Forest Department.

i) 8th : Inkriyal Tank.

ii) 22nd : Icrisat Campus.

This will be a full day trip. Members are requested to carry lunch packs.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Vol 17/4/2001

No. 14

February 1989

EDITORIAL

This season's mid-winter waterfowl census has been a good one. Better organisation, better participation and better coverage have yielded better results. Members not only covered wetlands which were worked last year, but ventured away from the city and censused new waterbodies. Besides the waterfowl census work, the immense satisfaction of working new areas, gaining travel experience and recording bird and animal life in new areas was extremely rewarding to every participant.

There was disappointment. Pocharam Tank in Medak dist., was devoid of bird life compared to last year, when Rajiv Mathew recorded greater flamingo, fairly large rafts of pintail and other ducks and pochards and an immense flock of over 5000 demoiselle cranes! There was also excitement. Masses of ducks, flamingos and waders in Pulicat Lagoon were reported by Siraj Taher. Waterbodies in Warangal dist., yielded good records to Rajiv. All this was experienced. There was also a great horned owl suddenly emerged onto a boulder below Pocharam - bu-boing for a mesmerized audience - and a Ruddy Mongoose (*Herpestes smithi*), with its black tipped tail, strolling nonchalantly at 6 in the evening, on the same broken ground below the Pocharam spillway. Fantastic broken bouldery country on the way to Koil Sagar (Mahbubnagar Dist.) had some stopping frequently and gorgeous sunsets marked the ends of fruitful days. While returning we all realised that this is just the beginning!

PROGRAMME FOR FEBRUARY 1989

1) INDOOR MEETING :- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.45 p.m.

1) 20th : Participants of the Mid-winter Waterfowl Census will relate their experiences.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

1) 12th : MAHAVIR HARINA VANASTHALI.

The original programme was a trip to Manjira Reservoir, but due to unavoidable circumstances it stands postponed. (The inconvenience caused is regretted!)

1) 26th : ANANTAGIRI RESERVE FOREST.

This will be a full day trip and members are requested to carry lunch.

NEWS

* Members visited ICRISAT Campus in Patancheru, Medak dist., on

22/1/'89. Nearly a hundred species of birds were seen in the varied habitats of grasslands, waterbodies, groves, fallow lands, fields, etc. Near the Campus Lake, members were enthralled by an osprey, which picked up a huge fish in its talons and grasping it lengthwise, circled over the group a few times, obviously deciding where to perch and commence feeding. Later, driving beside a small marshy area, full of typha, two Baillon's Crakes were sighted. They were diminutive, cryptic little things - seemingly unperturbed by all the animated attention they were getting. They fed among the stems of the typha, venturing into the open, only to dash across to another clump of reeds. Other notable migrants were the bluethroat, bluetailed bee eater and greater spotted eagle. Grey heron were nesting on palm trees near the Red Tanks and openbilled storks were seen perching atop small trees growing on the fringes in ICRISAT Lake. Will they make it their home?!

* The following are recent reports of birds seen by members of the Society, in A.P.

a) Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*):- 56 birds seen in a flock in Pulicat Lagoon by Siraj and Humayun Taher in January 1989.

b) Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*):- Members had good views of a pair in ICRISAT Campus on 26 January.

c) Little Crake (*Porzana parva*):- Rajiv Mathew saw one bird with a trapper in Warangal district in Jan this year.

d) Besra Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter virgatus*):- Reported by Rajiv Mathew from the Jeedimetla area on 18 Jan., at 1230 hours. The barred thighs and thick mesial stripe were clearly seen by him.

e) Greyheaded Fishing Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*):- A pair at Pakhal on 26 Jan., seen by Rajiv Mathew.

* We are happy to inform members that Messers Bhadrachalam Paper Board Ltd., have agreed to donate paper for the PITTA, for one full year! This paper is manufactured from recycled waste paper. Also, Mr Amarveer, a member of BSAP, has volunteered to photo type-set the PITTA and the MAYURA, for the Society, free of cost! We are extremely thankful to them for their kind help and cooperation.

* The editor has received a communication from Dr Asad Rahmani which states about the Blacknecked Stork, " it seems this species is certainly endangered. There is no recent record from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala and very few from A.P. Mr Jaganmohan Rao told me that he saw 3 birds near Mannanur and 7 in Dindi River in 1988. Last year during the Asian Waterfowl Count, only one was recorded from A.P. ... I think every sight record is now important."

* How many feathers does a bird have? Not surprisingly, ornithologists have attempted to make counts. They have found that many birds have 20 percent fewer feathers in the summer than in the winter - summer clothing is lighter! - and that feathers grow in predictable patterns over the body. Hummingbirds have from 900 to 1,000 feathers - a rather small total - and one patient ornithologist counted 25,216 on a whistling swan. Small birds have more feathers per unit of body weight than large ones, probably because of their high metabolism and the constant need to retain heat. Feathers make up from four to 12 percent of a bird's total weight. (BWD:11/1/60:Pat Vosburgh in 'The Fabulous Feather'.)

This issue is printed on paper made from agricultural residues.

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY

Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by Aasheesh Pittie.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

17/4/201

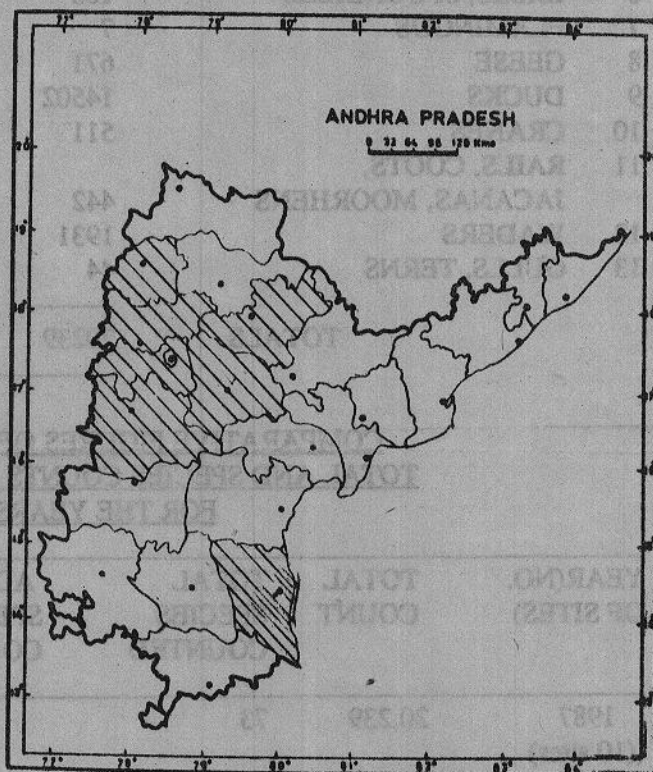
No. 15

March 1989

EDITORIAL

LIST OF MEMBER PARTICIPANTS OF THE 1989 ASIAN MIDWINTER WATERFOWL CENSUS AND THE DISTRICTS THEY WORKED IN

- 1 Siraj Taher
- 2 Humayun Taher
- 3 Sushil Kapadia
- 4 Rajeev Mathew
- 5 Suhel Quader
- 6 Mary Peacock
- 7 M S Kulkarni
- 8 C R Sarath
- 9 D K Mohan
- 10 Sohel Mohamed
- 11 Dasarathi
- 12 Aasheesh Pittie
- 13 Smriti Pittie
- 14 Kaushal Gangakhedkar
- 15 K N Sudhir Rao
- 16 K N Ramanathan Rao
- 17 Vijay Kumar
- 18 G Shankar
- 19 E Narsimulu
- 20 K N Banerji
- 21 A A Aziz
- 22 P Balkoteshwar Rao



PROGRAMME FOR MARCH 1989

1) **INDOOR MEETING:-** Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:45 p.m.

i) 7th : Slide show by Suhel Quader and talk by members of the BSAP on experiences at the BNHS bird ringing camp in Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh.

ii) 20th : Audio-visual presentation on Nature Photography, by B P Maithi.

2) **FIELD TRIPS:** We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A P Forest Department.

i) 12th : ANANTHGIRI RESERVE FOREST.

This will be a full day trip and members are requested to carry lunch pack .

ii) 26th : PALMAKOLE TANK AND NARSAPPAGUDA.
This will be a half day trip.

NEWS

COMPARATIVE FIGURES OF ASIAN MIDWINTER WATERFOWL CENSUS IN ANDHRA PRADESH - FOR 1987 : 1988 : 1989 (COUNTS BY MEMBERS OF BSAP)

BIRD GROUP	1987 (10 SITES)	1988 (19 SITES)	1989 (50 SITES)
1 GREBES	507	108	452
2 PELICANS		519	896
3 CORMORANTS	269	2107	2264
4 EGRETS, HERONS	752	3130	24492
5 STORKS	440	464	1541
6 IBISES, SPOONBILLS	163	212	1179
7 FLAMINGOS	7	2238	13000
8 GEESE	671	31	2142
9 DUCKS	14502	23922	157458
10 CRANES	511	5705	400
11 RAILS, COOTS, JACANAS, MOORHENS	442	1727	3234
12 WADERS	1931	17961	12279
13 GULLS, TERNS	44	425	1113
TOTALS	20239	58030	220450

COMPARATIVE FIGURES OF ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS TOTAL AND SPECIES COUNTS MADE BY BSAP MEMBERS IN A.P. FOR THE YEARS 1987 : 1988 : 1989

YEAR(NO. OF SITES)	TOTAL COUNT	TOTAL SPECIES COUNTED	ADDL. SPECIES COUNTED	SPECIES NOT SEEN	DIFFER. +/-
1987 (10 sites)	20,239	73	-	-	-
1988 (19 sites)	58,030	81	14	6	+8
1989	2,20,450	87	18	4	+14
"	"	"	14	8	+6

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Hyderabad - 500 036. INDIA.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Vol 17/4/2001

No. 16.

April 1989

EDITORIAL

"Later (1946) I analysed the recorded prey of European raptors, and found that each species differs from every other in its main prey, except for those which take chiefly lemmings. This led me to the idea that if a food supply is 'temporarily superabundant', so that it is not significantly reduced by the species preying on it, several different species can take it without effectively competing. The lemming predators come in this category, but in the years when lemmings are scarce, each species turns to different types of prey from every other. A superabundant food must, however, be only temporary, since otherwise the number of the birds preying on it will tend to rise until there is effective competition for it. Other good examples are seasonal fruits, seed crops, and flying termites, which are preyed upon when in season by a variety of passerine and other birds." (Extract from "Ecological Isolation In Birds" by Dr David Lack, 1971).

PROGRAMME FOR APRIL 1989

1) INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.45 p.m.

i) 3rd : Talk and slide show by Rahul Rastogi.

ii) 24th : Slide show by Srinivasa Chari.

2) OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

i) 9th : Indira Park and Public Gardens.

NEWS

* The following wetlands were covered by members of the BSAP in the Wetland Waterfowl Survey this year.

1) MEDAK DISTRICT:- Ardasu Cheruvu, Gosamudram, Icrisat Campus, Manjira Reservoir, Pocharam, Sangareddy, Venkatacheruvu.

2) MEHBOOBNAGAR DISTRICT:- Chinna Balanagar Cheruvu, Devarkadra, Erigandala Cheruvu, Koil Sagar, Makhtal Tank, Pedda Balanagar Cheruvu.

3) NALGONDA DISTRICT:- Kodad.

4) NELLORE DISTRICT:- Pulicat Lagoon, Nellapattu, Sriharikota, Thongala Cheruvu, Varagali.

5) NIZAMABAD DISTRICT:- Nizam Sagar Reservoir.

6) RANGA REDDY DISTRICT:- Durug & surrounding tanks, Fox Sagar, Gangaram, Himayat Sagar, Ibrahimpatnam, Kothapet, Miapur Tank, Nandiyal Tank, Narsappaguda, Osman Sagar, Palmakole, Rourial, Turkiyamjal.

7) WARANGAL DISTRICT:- Ghanpur Tank, Ischarla, Kachchapur, Pakhal, Parkal, Peddammakunta, Ramannagudem.

* Moorty and Surabhi are one couple among our members, who keep sending interesting notes to the Society from wherever their work takes them. A recent newspaper clipping from Lucknow claims that the rare Indian Pied Hornbill Anthracoceros malabaricus, listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, is being sold in parts of Dhanbad and Calcutta. The bird is trapped by tribals in the forests of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and sold on the superstitious premise that the bones cure rheumatism and are talismans against evil if worn on the body. This bird occurs in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh. Being an important indicator of the health of our forests, this hornbill should be protected. Members who witness the sale of this bird anywhere, should immediately contact the Society's Honorary Secretary or the Wildlife Wing of the A P State Forest Department.

* The Society's trip to Anantgiri Reserve Forest on 19.3.89 was a resounding success. Four members and a guest drove upto the AP Forest Depts.' Guest House atop the plateau on Saturday evening - and their birdwatching during dusk and early next morning combined with notes of the Society's members later in the day, resulted in a good bird list with some exciting birds seen. An enchanting valley, used by villagers to reach the Anantgiri Temple Complex, was 'discovered' where the APFD has a nursery and plantation (in a small area). Erythrina suberosa trees were in full bloom - and members saw the Haircrested Drongo Dicrurus hottentottus, on them. Near a huge ficus, which grew on the banks of a dry stream bed, we saw the Blueheaded Rock Thrush Monticola cinclorhynchus! On a steep side of this valley, completely overgrown and sparkling green with foliage, a Blackbird Turdus merula was reported - the orange eye-ring and bill - being distinctly noticed. Yellowthroated Sparrows Petronia xanthocollis and White Eyes Zosterops palpebrosa were numerous. Satinwood Trees Chloroxylon swietenia were very common and visible all around the plateau. They were in flower, creating a lovely patterned landscape of verdure and greenish-white blossoms. Near the Anantgiri Temple well, a resplendent male Paradise Flycatcher Terpsiphone paradisi flit-floated in white silk. Anantgiri certainly holds many a mystery yet to be unravelled.

* Between the 12th and the 14th of February, three members (Siraj Taher, Suhel Quader and P Balkoteshwar Rao) attended a bird ringing camp organised by the Bombay Natural History Society, at Pulicat Lagoon. 30 birds of 5 species were ringed on the 12th, 7 birds of 5 species on the 13th and 4 birds of 3 species on the 14th. The species ringed were Marsh, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Ruff, Blacktailed Godwit, Redwattle Lapwing, Temminck's and Little Stint, Grey Heron, Common Swallow and Blackwinged Stilt. Birds were trapped in mist nets, noore traps and clap traps. Two other members, D K Mohan and Ashfaq Ahmed, had visited the camp earlier. It is proposed to set up a permanent ringing station in the Tirupati Hills area.

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

Ind 17/2/2001

No. 17 & 18.

May & June 1989

EDITORIAL

In the preface to the first volume of his celebrated journal, STRAY FEATHERS, Allan Octavian Hume, the 'father' of Indian Ornithology, wrote (in 1873):

"No special scientific knowledge is necessary for the preparation of local faunas -- a man has to only collect steadily in almost any locality for a year or eighteen months, one or two specimens of every species he can come across in his neighbourhood; to note, as far as practicable, in regard to each whether they are rare or common, whether they are permanent residents or seasonal visitants, and if the latter, when they arrive, and when they leave; whether they breed in his neighbourhood, and if so, when; what their nests are like, where they are situated, how they are composed, how many eggs they lay and what these are like, and what their dimensions are; what the nestlings and what the young birds are like; what localities and what food the birds affect, and, even if he does all this very, very imperfectly in regard to a vast number of species, he will still (after his birds have been identified) possess materials for a most useful and instructive local avifauna, such as the most critically professed ornithologist will welcome cordially."

Though one should emphasise on bird 'watching' more than bird 'collecting' nowadays, the essence of the exercise is still the same. Data. It is more urgent now, what with the increased developmental activities of humans and their indifference to environmental degradation. Everyone of us can contribute!

NEWS

* "It is unlikely that many bird species inhabiting ... or visiting the country as regular seasonal migrants have escaped enumeration, or that any novelties still remain to be discovered and described hence. Therefore energy may now be profitably directed into more profitable channels. We still have a great deal to learn about the life-history and ecology of almost all our birds. These are subjects that cannot be studied from dead skins in a museum no matter how large or complete a collection is available. Neither can they get adequate justice from short seasonal field surveys with limited time and opportunities such as have necessarily formed the basis of this book. Only continuous, intensive field work combined with intelligent experimental and laboratory research are likely to produce the desired results. This implies patient and methodical observation, accurate recording, careful indexing and sifting of the records, and intelligent coordination and interpretation of the data.

"These processes cannot begin or function satisfactorily without, in the first instance, a correct identification of the bird concerned. With the aid of this handbook it is hoped that the reader - especially one who is fortunate enough to be residing in the pleasant places away from the haunts of man - will be enabled to make a beginning towards the filling of some of the glaring gaps in our knowledge of Indian birds.

"So little has been recorded about the living bird that almost any notes will be welcome. Information is particularly lacking concerning the habitats in which different birds live, the factors that limit certain species to certain types of habitat; how changes in habitat, brought about by human agency or natural causes, affect the composition of the bird life and the status and populations of its various components. We want precise information about the local migrations of various species, and about the factors upon which these movements depend. We want specific data on the food and feeding habits of birds; what quantity each individual consumes of each food item in different seasons and habitats, and at different stages of its life. It is important to determine by periodical censuses the population strength of a given species in a given habitat and thus be able to evaluate the true extent of the good or harm that a species does to agriculture, forestry, and other human interests and thereupon to devise adequate measures for its encouragement or control.

"In the years to come the importance of this branch of bird study, known as Economic Ornithology, is bound to receive due recognition in our country -- as it has received long since in the west. Therefore apart from the purely aesthetic and morphological angles from which Indian birds have been so far looked at, it is necessary that their utilitarian aspect should also be studied. A very large proportion of species eat insects, the vast majority of which are injurious in the highest degree to agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and allied human industry. Insectivorous birds exercise a very effective control upon insect pests. Owls and the diurnal birds of prey keep a check on the increase of field rats and mice and other vermin. Frugivorous birds are important agents in the dissemination of seeds and in extending the distribution of plants over vast stretches of country. The valuable sandalwood tree in south India, for example, is largely propagated by birds. Other species are specially adapted for a diet of flower nectar in obtaining which they, like bees, do considerable service in cross-pollinating and fertilizing flowers. The activities of some species on the other hand are largely destructive and harmful to man's interests, and the purpose of Economic Ornithology is to strike an accurate balance sheet between the harm and the good that different species do by making complete life-history and ecological studies. It is obvious that in a country like ours, so largely dependant upon agriculture and forestry, the role played by birds is of the highest economic consequence."

(Dr Salim Ali in THE BIRDS OF KERALA (1968)).

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Ind 17/7/2001

No. 19.

July 1989

EDITORIAL

More than 1,000 of the 9,000 species of birds in the world are now at risk of extinction, three times more than a decade ago, according to the International Council for Bird Preservation.

The most dramatic changes have occurred in the tropics. In Indonesia, for example, 126 bird species are now listed as threatened; in 1978 there were 14. Throughout the tropics, the number of threatened parrot species has almost doubled in the past decade.

Three Stanford ecologists warn that if human population continues to expand, "a world of hungry, unhappy people" will have only such "weedy" species as starlings, house sparrows and grackles - which thrive in people-altered environments - as their remaining bird companions."

(NATIONAL WILDLIFE Dec-Jan 1989 p. 32.)

PROGRAMME FOR JULY 1989

1) **INDOOR MEETING:-** Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:45 p.m.

i) 10th : Audio-visual presentation on Nagarhole National Park by Aasheesh Pittie and D L N Rau.

ii) 24th : Talk by Rajiv Mathew on the art of identification of birds in the field.

2) **OUTDOOR MEETING:-** We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

i) 16th : Golconda Fort and surrounding areas.

This will be a half day trip with birding in the vicinity of the Hathiyan Tree (Baobab Tree) and the Qutub Shahi Tombs.

NEWS

* A study by A K Chakravarty, on the predatory activity of the Goldenbacked Woodpecker Dinopium benghalense on the Cardamom Shoot-and-fruit Borer Dichocrocis punctiferalis has revealed interesting data. "This Pyralid Dichocrocis punctiferalis is a pest on cardamom. Despite 6 sprays recommended for controlling the borer, the damage persists. Three species of insect parasites have been recorded on the borer but its mortality due to parasitisation is negligible (0.05%)."

Predation by the woodpecker on this borer was evident in 6 of the 60 cardamom plantations (10%) surveyed by Mr Chakravarty. "On an average, the woodpecker devoured 22.8% of borer larvae. However the woodpecker's predatory activity was not found in plantations where

1. Pesticides were regularly used and /or
2. Old trees of diverse and mixed species were absent, and
3. Plantations of one species eg., Erythrina lithosperma were raised to provide shade for cardamom.

This is because such plantations offer no suitable sites for nesting and shelter. Because of their uniformity in canopy structure, age and size they are structurally less diverse compared to plantations where natural shade from several species of trees is regulated. Further, trees like Erythrina do not harbour insects like grubs, caterpillars and internal wood borers which are preferred by the woodpeckers.

(Chakravarty, A K (1988): Journal of the BNHS. 85/2/427-428.)

* "The roof of the cave (Niah Caves in Sarawak) offers considerably greater profit and danger. Shirtless, barefoot men with the courage of a Flying Wallenda hold on with one sweaty hand to a perch and with the other use a long pole to scrape the nests of black swifts off the ceiling. These saucer-shaped nests are made primarily out of bird saliva, appropriately termed 'nest cement' because it alone affixes the nest to the cave roof or walls. Although the substance is a glycoprotein of negligible nutritive value, chinese traders centuries ago exchanged porcelain, iron, gold and textiles for the delicacy. Today chinese restaurants throughout Southeast Asia serve the hardened bird saliva as bird's soup.

The nests of white swifts are even more valuable. In 1978 the Gomantong Caves in Sandakan, Sabah, produced some \$ 100,000 worth of white swift nests, which are worth as much as \$ 450/- for a pound of the best quality, while black swift nests sell for a paltry \$ 15/- per pound.

The bird nest business may not last. In Niah only five professional collectors, all old men, are licensed by the Sarawan Museum (the cave is an important archeological site) to risk their necks to feed gourmet chinese. And even if new collectors could be found there may be few nests for them to collect. Insecticides commonly used throughout the neighborhood alter the swifts' metabolism, causing them to lay eggs with thinner shells, which results in fewer successful births. Dr Y C Kong of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, noting that every year 1,000 tons of edible nests of swifts are imported to Hong Kong, speculates that an ecological hazard may result from the elimination of swifts since they are valuable insect predators."

(McNeely, J A and Watchel, P S (1988): SOUL OF THE TIGER: Searching for Nature's Answers in Exotic Southeast Asia pp. i-xviii and 1-390. Pub. Doubleday, New York.)

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Ind 11/2/2001

No. 20.

August 1989

EDITORIAL

The birds of Andhra Pradesh have been studied by very few people. The late Dr Salim Ali conducted an ornithological survey of the erstwhile Hyderabad State, in 1931-32. Later work was done by LaPersonne (and Whistler and Kinnear) under the aegis of the Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats (1930-37), Humayun Abdulali and of recent by Krishna Raju, S D Ripley, B M Bheeler, T D Price and S A Hussain.

Though Dr Ali's was a general ornithological survey of the entire Hyderabad State (the second part of the survey could not be carried out), the other ornithological efforts restricted themselves to pockets of Andhra Pradesh, mainly the Eastern Ghats section in the state - for more intensive study of birdlife and its adaptations and changes to increased human activity in these hills.

The fact however remains, that our knowledge about the birds found throughout Andhra Pradesh is still very very limited and totally out-of-date. This is where the amateur birdwatcher steps in.

If our members could keep notes/lists of birds they see on their travels through the state, and can narrow down their sightings to within a district (the smallest political-boundary parameter for a checklist), and mail these notes/lists to the Honorary Secretary of BSAP, a clearer picture about the avifaunal distribution in A.P. will emerge over time when these notes are collated. The fact has to be accepted that since the cause (bird study and conservation) is common, the efforts to further it have to be collective. Individual lists/notes cannot be as useful in isolation as when they are combined with others' - to present more cogent results.

If the BSAP can as a beginning, compile district-wise lists of birds, it would be laying a strong foundation not only for intensive ornithological studies in the state, but also for helping forestry, wildlife administration and planning of land and water resource use in a much more positive and beneficial way than is presently being done.

PROGRAMME FOR AUGUST 1989

1) INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:45 p.m.

i) 7th : Film show and discussion.

ii) 28th : T. Ganesh speaks on the foraging behaviour of the Rosy Pastor. Coverage by Doordarshan!

2) OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

i) 20th : Chilkur Deer Park.

This will be a half day trip with birding activity of the Society covered by the Doordarshan under its youth activities programme.

NEWS

* On every trip to the environs of Golconda Fort, three things are definitely pointed out to members. Last month, the Society's field trip was to this area and there were many fledgelings in our group. But one of the three things which is looked forward to with anticipatory joyousness by regular monsoonal birders here, was missing. The song of the Rain Quail Coturnix coromandelica. A considerable portion of the area around the Qutub Shahi Tombs has been fenced and a variety of exotics planted. Though they require much more care and water for growth than the local plant species, they are liked because they 'beautify' the landscape! Habitations are slowly encroaching upon land which had earlier been a buffer between Jubilee Hills and the Golconda Fort Area. Rain quails would always be heard on these outings. Their quick repeated double whistles mysteriously springing from patches of monsoonal ephemerals and all of us forced to quiet-down to be able to discern the avian music - oft-repeated, far-carrying, enigmatic. For the regulars their absence was a worrisome omission. For the new-comers, an unsolved mystery. The second phenomenon, of considerable import, was the carpet of monsoonal ephemeral plants which covered the land totally. Finger-tip sized flowers of yellow and red and white, spread across the ground in such abundance that one had to trample on them while walking. The commonest was the brace of diminutive white flowers known to science as Heliotropium zeylanicum. One wonders what biomass of micro-life this minuscule world holds. Unknown niches for complexities of insects and innumerable microscopia! Their profusion and the fact that they are the playground of the rain quail, lifts ones' spirit into the realm of bliss. But this year we did not hear the song of the rain quail. The third point concerns the Baobab Tree Adansonia digitata within the precincts of Golconda. In 1987, 19 birdwatchers had held hand around the trunk and barely managed to encircle it! Wrapt in local lore and part of the history of Hyderabad, its awesome size merits veneration. Instead it is slowly being covered with graffiti, spoiling the very essence of its aura. This is where tourism should step in and preserve monuments of social/historical importance. The Society has decided to send a status report to the concerned authorities about this area.

* An index of the first four volumes of MAYURA has been prepared and is available with the Honorary Secretary. Those interested in a xerox copy, should send him a Money Order for Rs. 10/- in favour of the BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH.

* It is still not too late to have your name included in the DIRECTORY & GUIDE OF INDIAN BIRDWATCHERS (see PITTA No. 7 & 8), being compiled by Dr. Kumar Ghorpade of Bangalore. Interested persons may write to him directly at the following address, or to the Hon. Sec. BSAP - for forms. Dr. Kumar Ghorpade, P O Box 2564, 123 Brigade Road, Bangalore - 560 025.

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Edited for the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh by
Aasheesh Pittie: 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD-500 012. INDIA.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Ind (7/11/2007)

No. 21.

September 1989

EDITORIAL

As a member of the environmental cognoscenti, should you insist that the store pack your groceries in a paper bag rather than one of the increasingly common plastic bags? Not necessarily, says Jan Beyea, National Audubon's senior policy scientist. Beyea began researching the great plastic vs. paper debate a year ago. Some plastics are more environmentally benign than their paper counterparts, Beyea says. Most paper bags are made from virgin pulp (no recycled content). Papermaking pollutes and costs trees. When buried, some papers release more toxins than some plastics. Not all plastics are born equal. Polyethylene - in such items as bags and drinking cups - is the least damaging plastic. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and similar plastics cause the most harm because of the high levels of pollution inherent in their manufacture. Bottles containing oils and soda are usually made of these plastics. Choose paper over plastic if you're near the coast, Beyea says, because so much plastic ends up on the beach. Reject plastic foam outright. Push recycling of both paper and plastics and encourage the development of biodegradable plastics. Urge manufacturers to use less wrapping. And which bag to choose at the supermarket? If you're really hip, Beyea says, you'll bring your own reusable grocery carrier. (AUDUBON. 91/3/119.)

India is not a use-and-throw society yet! But the day may not be far when this changes. Conservation, like charity, should begin at home. Newsprint, plastics (bottles, bags, buckets, etc.), glassware (bottles, containers) and metals, are all saleable to the agent of the local recycling centre. (He is the gentleman on the bicycle, with an old tin trunk on his carrier, riding through the locality, collecting trash from enlightened households). By ascertaining what is reusable in the house before discarding it and by selling what is reused by others, a member of the 'environmental cognoscenti' will not only save money, but also make some in the bargain!

PROGRAMME FOR SEPTEMBER 1989

- 1) INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:45 p.m.
 - i) 5th : Talk and audio-visual presentation by Mr Ramgopal, on the birds of Bharatpur.
 - ii) 18th : Talk by Mr K Jaganmohan Rao on the birds of Nagarjunasagar-Srisaillam Wildlife Sanctuary.
- 2) OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.
 - i) 24th : Central University of Hyderabad, Gachi Bowli.

NEWS

* An interesting feeding behaviour of the Whitebreasted Waterhen Amaurornis phoenicurus was observed by Mr S Balachandran. Reporting it in the Journal of the BNHS, he states, "It fed mainly on shrimp and small fishes. It used to enter the water for catching fish and shrimp even up to the depth where the water used to touch its belly. Whenever it caught any shrimp, it crushed the prey between the mandibles before swallowing it. Occasionally it caught a small catfish of 3-4 cm. After catching the fish, the bird would

hurry back to the land and many times I saw it dismembering the prey with the clear intention of dislodging the poisonous spines of the fish. Dismembered fish used to be brought again to the water for removal of sand particles. The fish was cleaned by holding it in the beak, then dipping it into the water and vigorously shaking it. On two occasions the poisonous spines of the catfish were collected by me after the bird had left the place." (Balachandar, S (1988): Some observations on unusual feeding behaviour of Whitebreasted Waterhen. JBNHS. 85/615-616.)

* The adaptations of birds to various situations around them, never cease to fascinate us. And the more we observe, the more we learn - more does the fascination increase! Shahid Ali, watching a Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus on Kihim Beach (Raigad district), noticed that whenever the bird stopped to pick up a morsel while foraging, it erected the white feathers on its forehead! "While engaged in foraging, the bird takes several mincing steps, often running in a zig-zag pattern; in doing this, it suddenly brakes to a stop to either 'collect' an insect on the sand surface or to probe the sand for a worm. It is at this stage, just a fraction of a second before it stops, that the feathers on the forehead are erected, revealing a large flash of pure white which extends up to the fore-crown. Once or twice in a sequence of seven or eight such observations between 0740 and 0755 hrs., the upper edge of the white band appeared to be mottled with brown. The plover was the only visible bird on the beach, except for a brief visit of one brahminy kite and two pariah kites, skimming over the Casuarina treetops c. 100 m. away. All the observations, made from 12-15 m. away with 10 x 40 binoculars, involved the bird directly or obliquely facing the sun which was just clearing the top of the Casuarina trees. The bird was feeding at the water's edge in an incoming tide, and was facing downwind in all the observations, which rules out the possibility of the feathers being ruffled by the wind. This behaviour may be analogous to the 'open-wing' (? wing-flashing) foraging pattern of several heron species (Ardeidae), wherein they create a shadow on the water's surface, thus attracting fish to the surface. It is however not clear how a sudden flash of white on the plover's forehead could make a worm or insect more vulnerable. One explanation suggested by Carl D'Souza, bird artist, is the possibility of the white patch having a reflective value when the bird is facing the sun, a situation when its prey - or the entrance to the worms' tubular hole - would be in shadow. This shadow may then, to some degree be illuminated by the birds' white feathers with the sun reflecting off them."

(Ali, Shahid (1988): Foraging-related change in forehead colour in Kentish Plover. JBNHS. 85/616-617.)

* At Mananur, Paloncha and other places I have remarked in my diary on the appalling ravages to ripening Jowari crops caused by Parrots. In the former locality - in fact all over the Amarabad Plateau - the Blossomheaded Parakeet is a veritable scourge to the cultivator. I constantly noticed flocks of hundreds of this species, augmented by parties of the Roseringed Parakeet engaged on their work of devastation, indifferent to the shouts and noises made by the ryots from their machans amidfield to scare them away, and studiously keeping out of range of the stones hurled at them through slings or 'gophuns'. Nor were the parrots alone; bands and flocks of other birds, Mynas (both Common and Blackheaded) and Common and Jungle Crows joined in the work of destruction. The ryots were in despair. Enquiries showed that often 50 percent, sometimes more, of their crops went as toll to the birds by day and to pigs and deer by night. From what I personally saw of the proceedings it seems a wonder how the birds left anything for the ryot at all!

(Ali, Salim (1933): The Hyderabad State ornithological survey. JBNHS. 36/365.)

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Ind 17/2/2001

No. 22

October 1989

EDITORIAL

" Not long ago I was encamped near the sea, and every morning I saw a pair of Kestrels performing the most wonderful evolutions on the beach. They were not hovering high in air, after the manner of their kind, scanning the ground for some creeping mouse or crouching lark, but flew very low, doubling often and darting about, as if in pursuit of some nimble prey. It took me some time to believe that they were after sand crabs. They did not make a large bag, for they were new to the work and did not set about it in the right way. But if they had kept at it they would have improved by practice. Then, if they had trained their young to the same pursuit the young would have beaten the parents. In a few generations the structure would have followed the habits, for those parts of the body which are not kept up by constant use soon become unfit, while those parts employed in any peculiar way adapt to their new task. We may find illustrations of this law everywhere. Tame ducks can scarcely fly a yard but their legs are stouter than those of wild ducks. Darwin says that the very bones of the legs of the tame ducks are proportionally heavier, but the wing bones are lighter. So the claws of the kestrel would have lost their keenness, his beak would have changed its shape, his legs and toes would have grown longer, and we should have had a very interesting new species of bird, the Crab-Hawk."

(E. H. Aitken in A NATURALIST ON THE PROWL. Contributed by HT)

PROGRAMME FOR OCTOBER 1989

INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:45 p.m.

i) 9th : Talk by Mr K Jaganmohan Rao on the birds of Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Wildlife Sanctuary.

ii) 23rd : Film show and discussion on the Society's Decennial celebrations in 1990.

2) OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

i) 15th : Fox Sagar. This will be a half-day trip.

ii) 29th : Shamirpet Deer Park and Lake. This too shall be a half-day trip.

NEWS

* A CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF ANDHRA PRADESH has been compiled by two of our members, Siraj Taher and Aasheesh Pittie. It is hoped that this will be a useful addition to the bird literature of Andhra Pradesh in particular and India in general. Copies are priced at Rs. 10/- each and can be purchased from the authors directly. See overleaf for addresses.

* On the morning of September 15th, a vulture was killed at Hyderabad airport when it got sucked into the engine of a landing airbus. The airline authorities could not provide the name of the species involved, but pointed that consequent to the plane hitting the bird, the aircraft's engines suffered extensive damage. The incident occurred when the airbus, on a flight from Delhi to Hyderabad was landing at the airport in the morning hours.

(HT)

* Members of the Society have been doing one type of birdwatching in all their outings uptill now. We walk along a path in our birding area, jotting down the birds seen while doing so. On 24th September, when the BSAP visited the Central University of Hyderabad, the method of birding was slightly different. We all stood in one place, near a pond on the campus, behind the computer and mathematics departments, and watched birds from there. The total tally for the day was 42 species of which 80% were seen from this one place. A pair of Pied Crested Cuckoos (*Clamator jacobinus*) seemed to be having a jolly time chasing each other and calling frequently - or maybe they were bothering some Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*) nearby. Two Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) beat over the pond, flushing Lesser Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*) and Coot (*Fulica atra*). The larger Spotbills (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) were not bothered by them. Grey and Painted Partridges (*Francolinus pondicerianus* & *F. pictus*) called intermittently and a small flock of Yelloweyed Babblers (*Chrysomma sinense*) argued with each other in some bushes close by. Suhel spotted a Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) and a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), thus taking the total number of migrants seen on the day to 31. We also met Dr. S. Marathe, who is involved with a nature club on the campus, whose monthly bulletin, NATURE NOTES, reaches us regularly.

* A ceiling of 30 lakh numbers for export of peacock tail feathers was released on 16th August by CCI&E Trade Notice no. 2. The quota will be released on the basis of highest unit value realisation. A minimum export price of Rs. 3 per piece was also fixed by the Public Notice. The export restriction will also apply to handicrafts containing peacock tail feathers. In order to maximise export of value added items, brooms, dusters, bundles will not be permitted. Further, crest feathers or other parts of peacock will not be allowed for export. The above system applies only to exporters who are not in one of the special categories. The latter are entitled to special quotas. Public Notice No. 20 of 16 August lists these categories as: established exporters, exporters of manufactured articles or handicrafts in which peacock tail feathers are used. These categories will be allowed exports on the basis of best year's exports. The respective Joint Chiefs will administer the quota allocation. The minimum export price of Rs. 3/- per piece will also be applicable in these cases. The restriction on export of peacock tail feathers is relevant for preservation of the National Bird. Nonetheless, the exporters of these very items are eligible to incentives such as income tax holiday and export house recognition. The latter facility will give the benefit of the additional licence to the peacock tail exporters. It is difficult to reconcile incentive and restrictions for the same export item. (THE ECONOMIC TIMES 16/9/1989)

* Working on the assumption that the number of sparrows in a year's time was likely to be roughly the same as the current level, and using extensive published data on sparrow population dynamics, we calculated how many sparrows would be expected to die during the course of a year. Comparing this figure with the total number of sparrows that cats caught in the village, we found that between a third and a half of all sparrow deaths were attributable to cats. This figure seemed staggering: it is highly unlikely that any other single predator could have this much impact on the house sparrow population of the village. To get some idea of the importance of domestic cats as predators over the whole country you need only to multiply the mean annual catch of the village cats by the estimated total domestic cat population of Britain. This comes out to about 70 million deaths. Of this, between 30%-50% may be birds, depending on whether we are dealing with an urban (centre of the village) or more rural (edge of the village) situation. So domestic cats kill at least 20 million birds a year in Britain. (Churcher, P B & Lawton, J H (1989): Beware of well-fed felines. NATURAL HISTORY. 7/1989 pps. 40-47.)

* Mr Ramgopal's slide show in the BSAP's indoor meeting last month, transported members to the marshes of Bharatpur, the glades of Kanha and the forests of Nagarhole. Mr Ramgopal emphasised the fact that following the principles of photography is crucial for the creation of good pictures. He explained how the "catch-light" in an animal's or bird's eye, breathed life into a photograph. Members were enthralled by his pictures and at the end, one member remarked she seldom got to see the animals from such a close distance in the wild!

* Non-governmental organisations, fighting for a cleaner, safer environment, should take strength from the fact that the central sector Bharat Aluminium Co. Ltd. (BALCO) has decided to close down its bauxite mining project in the Gandhamardan Hills, about 180 kms. from Sambalpur (Orissa), in the face of "stiff opposition" from the local population and at the request of the Orissa government. BALCO had already spent Rs. 28 crores on the implementation of the project. The local people had opposed the project from the day its foundation was laid in May 1983 on the ground that it would adversely affect the ecology of the area. (THE ECONOMIC TIMES 20/9/1989)

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Contribution acknowledgements: Humayun Taher.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Vol 17/2 2001

Nos. 23 & 24

November & December 1989

EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL

" On 19th November 1989 in Sanjivaiah Park, 3 young little grebe were seen in company of the parent birds. The two adults took turns to feed the chicks. While one adult led the young across the waters, the other swam swiftly ahead grabbing pond skaters and occasionally diving. After about 2 minutes it returned to the chicks and fed them. Meanwhile the other adult, seeing the first one with the chicks went off in pursuit of prey. The first adult then took up a position at the back of the young and awaited the return of its mate. Then the whole process was repeated.

" The reflexes of the young are very fast. Once when a crow flew close overhead they immediately dived without any visible signal or alarm from the accompanying adult. Once when the shadow of a kite fell on the water ahead of them they seemed unconcerned, but when the shadow fell on them, immediately they dived, staying underwater for about 10 seconds!" - HUMAYUN TAHER

If ornithology is an iceberg, afloat on the ocean of science, then a checklist (bird-list) is just its tip. Compiling lists is enjoyable for one gets to see such a fascinating variety of birds in a short time while in the field. But like all things cursory, this exercise too brushes over the really interesting parts - those submerged behind the eddies created by hurrying listers. Stop a moment near that iora and watch him work with diligence from branch tip to branch to trunk, searching for food. His cocked head spies behind leaves, quickly peers around flowers. The breeze wafts his 'shaubheegi' call to your ear and you notice there is a female in the next tree! Unconsciously you have stumbled upon an avian dalliance, of extraordinary fervour and panache accompanied by soul-stirring music. It comes to you through the soft yellow inflorescences of the babool, floated from a throat seemingly too delicate to bear its strain and power. Captivated you stand, absorbing the drama of their courtship - transfixed by a gnawing urge to enquire, to question, to wonder and to learn. Rooted with fascination, you enter the world of the iora, as you would that of the iceberg, as Humayun did that of the grebes.

It could also be called (bird) behaviour watching.

PROGRAMME FOR NOV. & DEC. 1989

INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:30 p.m.

13/11 : A.V.P. by Rajiv Mathew on identification of waders.

27/11 : Talk by Aasheesh Pittie on Birdwatching.

11/12 & 26/12 : Film shows.

OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

5/11 : Narepally Deer Park. 19th : Sanjivaiah Park.

Both will be half-day trips.

3/12 : Rourial Tank. 17/12 : Manjira Reservoir.

The former will be a half-day trip and the latter a full-day one where members should bring pack-lunches.

NEWS

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR 1990? Kindly do so at the earliest. We have put the mailing list on a computer which is rather strict about membership details. It will be difficult to mail copies of the Society's bulletin and newsletter to those who have not renewed their membership by 31st MARCH 1990! **LINE UP FOLKS!**

* October birding is always full of surprises because the migrants are in. On 15th October, the zoo had three such visitors. The redbreasted flycatcher made its presence known by characteristic flits between slender low branches, where things are supposed to be quieter, uttering its electric 'chrrrit' no sooner it landed, agitatedly raising and lowering its tail. Generally the orange on the breast is missing, but the pumping tail and its black and whitish pattern below are giveaways. And yes, also the slim white ring around the eye. Having survived our walk through the lion safari, we sat on benches in front of the white rhino enclosure and glassed the various wagtails scampering on the partly squelchy ground inside, when on the farther boundary, where the underbrush begins behind the fence, two special wagtails moved to a different waltz. Their tails swung from side to side as they hurried to the tune of their hungry bellies. These were forest wagtails, on their way further south and west from the north-east. Some saw them, some didn't. But they were there alright. Near the elephant maidan, we stopped for the powered antics of bluetailed bee eaters. They are much bigger, have more muscle and so greater flying style and their call is deeper than the resident green ones. They also move around a great deal. A flock of 6-8 birds hunts or flies together, the birds hunting individually as they go along, calling intermittently. They make a lovely sight. **CAN JUST THREE BIRDS MAKE ONE'S DAY?!**

* On a personal field trip (1/11) to Jeedimetla Tank or Fox Sagar, we came face to face with the dilemma of development versus the environment. Ironically, this tank, like so many others of its type, was constructed to store water for drinking and agriculture. We were shocked to see on this trip that it is now being used by the MCH as a garbage dump. Where the trash now lies, used to run an exhalation of larks, whose songs made the air musically audible to one's ears. Among the water birds reported from here in the past 5 years have been such rare sightings as curlew, dunlin and blacktailed godwit. This morning was either not good for birding or the birds had deserted Fox Sagar. The list comprised of house and jungle crows, pariah kites in large numbers, a lone marsh harrier flying over the lake as though it did not exist (perhaps the most potent sign of its degradation, as he is a predator and will not let any opportunity of scouting marshes or open water for likely prey, go by) and a lone pied kingfisher making repeated unsuccessful dives for fish. If something is to be done to save this little tank from ruin, it had better be done double quick.

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Contribution acknowledgements: Humayun Taher.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Vol 17/200

No. 25 & 26

January & February 1990

EDITORIAL

As in the past 3 years, the Society will participate in the annual Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Count conducted by the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) and coordinated in India by S A Hussain of Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Bombay. A letter from him states, "In order to continue the good work begun by you all we are enclosing herewith information for 1990 counts. DATES: BETWEEN 4 JANUARY and 21 JANUARY 1990. These dates include three week-ends. It will, however, be more appropriate to centre the counts on 13/14 January. You may do counts on all the week-ends falling within the above period. Only you have to select different sites and use different set of forms. To do this you can have the forms xeroxed or simply write on a blank sheet with relevant data. Counts done in December or February can be sent, but these will not be of much use for analysis of annual counts. We will, however, encourage you to send us additional information on waterfowl of your area. We will be happy to include these as special items in our forthcoming Newsletter (INDIA). Some hints:-

- 1) Try to revisit the same wetlands every year as far as possible.
- 2) Contact fellow birdwatchers in your area for better coordination.
- 3) Please send all forms (after keeping a xerox copy for yourself) to us in Bombay.
- 4) COMPLETED FORMS SHOULD REACH US IN BOMBAY BY THE END OF FEBRUARY 1990. WE ARE PUTTING ALL DATA ON COMPUTER AND A COPY OF IT WILL BE SENT BY US TO IWRB. THIS IS ESSENTIAL AS WE NEED TO RECTIFY ANY DISCREPANCIES IN LOCATION OF SITES OR ANY OTHER DATA WHICH IWRB WILL NOT BE IN A POSITION TO CHECK AND RECTIFY.
- 5) NATIONAL COORDINATOR WILL PREPARE NATIONAL REPORT WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY BE INCLUDED IN INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER. PLEASE SEND THE DATA EARLY.

I take this opportunity to convey my sincere thanks for the whole hearted cooperation given and the enthusiasm generated by you all which made the campaign a great success. IWRB have brought out Asian Newsletter for 1989 Counts which will shortly be distributed to all those who participated in the 1989 counts."

Members desiring to participate in these counts may contact the Honorary Secretary who will coordinate the counts in A.P. so that duplication is avoided. Count forms should be given to him for onward mailing to Bombay.

PROGRAMME FOR JAN. & FEB. 1990

INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:30 p.m.

16/1 ; 12/2 ; 26/2 : Film Shows.

OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

7/1 : Narsapur Reserve Forest. 21/1 : ICRISAT Campus.

Both will be full-day trips. Members are requested to get pack-lunch.

18/2 : Anantagiri Reserve Forest.

This will also be a full-day trip.

NEWS

* The Decennial Seminar organised by the Society on THE ROLE OF BIRDS IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR CONSERVATION will be on 7th & 8th February 1990 at Directorate of Oilseeds, 'Telhan Bhavan', Opposite Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam Information Centre, Liberty Cinema Road, Himayat Nagar, HYDERABAD - 500 029. Those desiring to participate may contact the Hon. Sec. at the address given below.

* Dr Kumar Ghorpadé will conduct an informal workshop for members of the Society on 11th February at Narsapur Reserve Forest. The workshop will cover topics like Tips of field identification of birds, Appreciation of habitats, Demonstrations of entomological collection techniques, identification of insect families, etc. Interested members should contact the Hon. Sec. well in advance to help make transport arrangements.

* Two Bank Mynas Acridotheres ginginianus were observed feeding with a flock of Common Mynas Acridotheres tristis in roadside-fields in Medak District on 7/12/89 by Aasheesh Pittie. Later, Siraj Taher reported 2 birds in ICRISAT campus. In Andhra Pradesh there is just one previous record of this bird from Vizag. According to the Handbook, its distribution limit in the south is a rough line from Bombay to Balasore in N. Orissa. A record from Madras is thought to be an escapee. What could be the status of these birds from A.P.? Only more birding will tell!

* The Society's camp at SHAR Centre on Sriharikota Island, Nellore District, was a grand success. Ten members attended this camp from 31.12.89 to 4.1.90. Excellent arrangements were made by Mr K R Seetharaman, Head Tech. Photo Facility for their stay and movement within SHAR Centre and also to Pulicat Lagoon. Mr E Narasimhulu, DFO, Sullurupet, took the group under his fold no sooner they arrived and was their constant guide and companion. It was mainly due to his efforts that the group moved around and observed birds in Pulicat. The BNHS team, comprising of Dr K K Mahapatra and Mr Prakash Rao, stationed at SHAR Centre for bird-ringing, also helped us and patiently demonstrated how they trapped and ringed birds. A boat trip for the entire group was arranged one day from SHAR to Tada by the DFO. He also took them to Nelapattu where they saw Spottedbilled Pelicans, Shags and Night Herons in hundreds. Other attractions (at Pulicat) were Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Pintails, Shovellers and Gadwals in uncountable numbers. Blacktailed Godwits, Curlews and a variety of Tringa sp. were the waders which fed alongside the causeway from the mainland to SHAR. A pair of Whitebellied Sea Eagles kept constant vigil over the whole area. One evening their nest was discovered high on a pylon on SHAR. Scrub birds included Indian Pittas, Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Coucals, Pied Crested Cuckoos, Small Greenbilled Malkohas, etc. A more detailed report will be printed in the Mayura, later.

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For information write: Siraj Taher, Honorary Secretary,

6-3-249/3 Road No. 1, Banjara Hills, HYDERABAD - 500 034. INDIA.

Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD - 500012.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Ind 17/2/2001

No. 27

March 1990

PROGRAMME FOR MARCH 1990

INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:30 p.m.

i) 12th : Film show.

ii) 26th : Audio-visual presentation by Mr Varaprasad, A.P. Forest Range Officer, on the Indonesian Archipelago.

OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

i) 4th : ANANTAGIRI RESERVE FOREST.

March is a month when the attractive red blossoms of the Coral Tree Erythrina suberosa draw Haircrested Drongos Dicrurus hottentottus to their nectar. Blueheaded Rock Thrushes Monticola cinclorhynchus play hide and seek in the shadows of deciduous trees and the crackling carpet their leaves create on the ground. Anantagiri is the place where such sights can be experienced. There is the magic of the Paradise Flycatcher Terpsiphone paradisi and the mystery of the Blackbird Turdus merula. Anantagiri will be a full-day trip, so come with lunch packs!

ii) 18th : AMANGALU LAKE, MAHABUBNAGAR DISTRICT.

Birding at the Ramanutala Forest Nursery on the way is a bonus on trip. This will also be a full day trip.

NEWS

* Agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was able to smash another international smuggling ring. Posing as collectors of exotic birds, they were able to unearth the racket after hard work, spanning a period of 20 months. According to a report, the federal indictment cited dealers in Singapore, Buenos Aires and Mexico city as well as in the U.S. Arrests were made in southern California and Honolulu. The ring leaders were the Californian dealers. Their target was birds belonging to parrot family, all native to southeast Asia and Latin America. Contacts were built up with dealers in Singapore and Argentina who arranged for the birds to be smuggled into these countries and thence to the office of a Mexican veterinarian at Mexico City International Airport. The surviving birds - and this trade is notoriously cruelly wasteful - were then forwarded to a "safe house" in Tijuana for smuggling across the U.S. borders. The 20-month under-cover operation saw hundreds of parrots worth around half a million dollars passing through the Singapore/Argentina/Mexico/California pipeline. Among them were black palm cockatoos, hyacinth macaws and military macaws which are in CITES Appendix I. Just one of these cockatoos may sell for \$ 25,000 - and the macaws will fetch not far short of this. That the law now recognizes the gravity of wildlife smuggling offences is shown by the maximum penalties faced by the defendants in this case. They range from five years in jail and/or a \$ 250,000 fine for the lesser offenders and upto 60, 65 even 75 years jail term and/or fines of \$ 35,000,000 and more for the ringleaders.

- ANIMAL CITIZEN 4/1989.

* In its souvenir brought out for the Decennial Seminar, the Society has reprinted Dr Salim Ali's THE HYDERABAD STATE ORNITHOLOGICAL SURVEY from the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. This survey was carried out by Dr Salim Ali in the erstwhile Hyderabad State in the years 1931 and 1932 and the results were published by the BNHS in its Journal, with taxonomical notes by Hugh Whistler. Since it was Dr Salim Ali's first regional ornithological survey in India, it laid the foundation for his later work. The entire paper is full of detailed notes on the species observed and collected by him and makes excellent reading by itself as well as a first class scientific paper. The Society proposes to sell these Souvenirs at Rs. 50/- per copy (Rs. 25/- for members), plus postage at actuals. As the number of copies is limited, it will be wise to book one early from the Honorary Secretary, BSAP, Road No. 1, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad - 500 034.

* Papers presented at the Decennial Seminar of the Society held on 7th and 8th February 1990:-

1. Yahya, H S A & Ahmed, Ashfaq - Feeding impact of Crows Corvus spp., in Bajra fields around Aligarh Muslim University campus.
2. Rao, P. Syamsunder, et. al. - The role of birds in agriculture ecosystem.
3. Taher, Siraj A. - Integral planning of conservation and development projects.
4. Kumar, V Vijay & Choudhury, B C - Studies on the waterfowl of Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary - Medak district, A.P.
5. Sridhar, S & Harave, H S - Nesting of Blackbacked Woodpecker Chrysocolaptes festivus around Bangalore: Examples of (a) symbiosis (b) competitors.
6. Johnson, M., et. al. - Some observations on the feeding and breeding biology of Openbill Storks Anastomus oscitans in A.P.
7. Taher, Siraj A. - History of ornithological works in A.P.
8. Ghorpade, Dr Kumar - Food of Indian birds and its implication in the Peninsular agro-ecosystem.
9. Kanniah, P & Ganesh, T - Importance of kanchas in bird conservation.
10. Ghorpade, Dr. Kumar - Some distribution patterns of Indian birds and their relevance to biogeography and systematics.
11. Hussain, S A - Wetlands and waterfowl - aspects of development.
12. Grubh, Dr R B - Bird hazard to aircraft in India.
13. Bhushan, Bharat - Search for the Jerdon's Courser.

Besides these, several other papers were received. All of them will be published by the Society in the near future.

* Some sidelights of the Seminar were a bookstall by M/s Natraj Publishers of Dehra Dun - who had a brisk sale of books on natural history and, the sale of T-shirts with the BSAP logo in the front and the slogan BIRDS ARE BEAUT on the back. These T-shirts are collarless and white in color with red and turquoise blue printing. They were quite popular, inspite of their late arrival and some sizes were sold immediately. The following sizes, 85, 90, 100 & X-large can be purchased from the Hon. Sec's. office for Rs. 50/-. These T-shirts were kindly offered by Mr M K Kashinath on consignment basis.

* Mr S Sridhar of Bangalore, who has given an excellent series of 'Birds of Bangalore' photo-essays in recent issues of FRONTLINE, gave the participants of the Seminar a fascinating AVP on the birds of South India. Most of his pictures were of nesting birds. Another very different AVP was that of Mr Subba Rao. An advertiser by profession, he is appalled by the huge mounds of garbage churned out by us Hyderabadis and the unbelievably shocking lethargy of the municipal authorities in despatching this offal. His graphic slides did have a rather sobering effect on participants and many wondered how Mr Rao withstood the nausea which must have surely pervaded his senses while he stood clicking away! I suppose it was his disgust with the system and his urge to bring the apathy to light, which fortified his venture!

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Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD-500012. INDIA.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Ind. 17/2/2001

No. 28

April 1990

EDITORIAL

PITTA is not as much an organ of the Society as it is a facility available to every member. Send in your observations! A one-liner exclaiming "I saw a golden oriole! It was sooooo beautiful!" is as effective as a longer one on the bathing habit of bulbuls in the water-dish on your lawn. What you see and experience is unique. It is not seen or experienced by others. SHARE your observations. Please write to us about the spray of bougainvillea which made you stop for a minute, get down from everyday life, and look. Actually see! Is there a bird which used to be around your place some years ago, but is not seen now? The house sparrow perhaps? Do nightjars not call from yonder rocks? Maybe you got to observing the antics of pariah kites flying above and wondered

If we have an artist among our readers who could do some sketches for the bulletin, we could make its impact more graphic. Perhaps the guide to bird identification, published in earlier issues, could be revived. Small sketches of impressions on field trips, which need not be restricted to birds at all, but may encompass nature herself (a cluster of flowers, or a tumble of rocks) - could be sprinkled across the page!

Members could also help by sending in media (newspaper, magazine, etc.) cuttings of news which is relevant to the habitat and which they consider important - for inclusion in PITTA. Everyone is speaking of the Tehri Dam, goodness knows it is an important issue! But are we letting go some other ecological calamity, large or small, in the small print? Your cutting / extract could just be something on nature which you enjoyed reading, and would like to share!

PROGRAMME FOR APRIL 1990

INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:30 p.m.

2nd & 30th : Film shows.

FIELD TRIP:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the A.P. Forest Department.

16th : Nehru Zoological Park.

This will be a half-day trip.

NEWS

* As stated in the Nov-Dec 1989 (Nos. 23 & 24) issue of PITTA, our mailing list has been computerised. It will be difficult now to send copies to those members (of 1989) who have not renewed their membership for 1990. However, those desirous of becoming members in the current year, may do so before May 31st, when the mailing list will be finalised for the year, retaining only paid members. You are requested to correct your addresses and along with your phone numbers, send them to the Honorary Secretary for processing.

* " A second feature of the breeding ecology of the starlings is the almost universal laying of spotted eggs, generally with a bluish background. In only *Sturnus*, *Acridotheres*, *Creatophora* and *Ampeliceps* are the eggs known to be unspotted, but in some species of even these genera spotted eggs may be occasionally laid. The spotting on eggs is usually thought to serve the function of camouflage (Lack 1966: Population Studies of Birds. Oxford University Press, Oxford.) and true hole-nesting birds like owls and woodpeckers lay white eggs: Lack suggests that the white colouration within the dark nest cavity helps the parents to see the eggs. It therefore seems strange that while the nest sites used by starlings consist mainly of holes, most of the family lay cryptic eggs. However, another difference between the typical hole-nesters and starlings is that while the former rarely take any material into the hole, starlings as a rule make bulky nests within their cavities. Perhaps

starlings are derived from an ancestor which laid its eggs in a more open situation, possibly building a cup-shaped nest, and the acquisition of the hole-nesting habit has occurred during the evolution of the family, reaching its highest stage of development in the Sturnus-like starlings that lay unspotted eggs. "

(Feare, C 1984: The Starling. Oxford Univ. Press. Oxford.)

* MANJIRA BARRAGE

LOCATION:- 17°38'N, 78°05'E; 50 km northwest of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

AREA: 2,000 ha. ALTITUDE: c. 450m. WETLAND TYPE: Water storage reservoirs, dams.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE: A water storage reservoir formed by a barrage on the Manjira River. The lake has a varied shoreline with agricultural land (chiefly rice paddies and maize fields) on two sides. There are filter beds behind the earthen bund at the eastern end of the lake. Two small islands and extensive marshy fringes together with the diverse aquatic vegetation in the lake provide considerable ecological diversity. The maximum depth at the barrage is 16km, the average depth 7.5-10.5m. Parts of the lake dry out during the dry season. The pH value is 8.5 and the alkalinity 184 mg per litre. Together with Osman Sagar, Himayat Sagar and Nizam-Sagar, Manjira Barrage forms part of a complex of numerous small lakes west and northwest of Hyderabad.

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS: Rather dry tropical monsoon climate, with temperatures ranging from 10°C to 41°C.

PRINCIPAL VEGETATION: Extensive marshy fringes and abundant aquatic vegetation with species typical of the region. The islands were originally wooded, but these have recently been cleared. Surrounding areas are mainly agricultural land with scattered Acacia spp.

LAND TENURE: State owned.

CONSERVATION MEASURES TAKEN: The reservoir is protected as a Crocodilian Sanctuary for the Marsh Crocodile Crocodylus palustris. A restocking programme was initiated in 1978, and by January 1987, 15 young crocodiles had been released.

LAND USE: The reservoir provides drinking water for the city of Hyderabad.

DISTURBANCES AND THREATS: There is relatively little human activity in the area but some illegal hunting has been reported. The felling of trees on the islands has reduced the availability of roosting and nesting sites for large waterbirds.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUES: The reservoir provides an important water supply for the surrounding areas.

FAUNA: The lake supports a rich avifauna typical of the undisturbed wetlands in this region and is an important wintering area for migratory waterfowl. Approximately 1,650 waterfowl of 46 species were present in January 1987, rather fewer birds than usual. They included 100 herons and egrets of seven species and:

24 Pseudibis papillosa
450 Tadorna ferruginea
510 ducks of 12 other species
220 Fulica atra

53 Anser indicus
60 Nettapus coromandelianus
50 Porphyrio porphyrio

and small numbers of 12 species of shorebirds.

The Marsh Crocodile Crocodylus palustris occurs at the reservoir, and is the subject of a restocking programme.

SPECIAL FLORAL VALUES: None known.

RESEARCH AND FACILITIES: Waterfowl censuses were carried out in January 1987.

REFERENCES: van der Ven (1987).

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION: a) It supports an appreciable assemblage of rare, vulnerable or endangered species or subspecies of plant or animal or an appreciable number of individuals of any one or more of these species, b) it regularly supports substantial numbers of individual from particular groups of waterfowl indicative of wetland values, productivity or diversity.

SOURCE: Siraj A. Taher and Kaushal Gangakhedkar.

(Extracted from "A DIRECTORY OF ASIAN WETLANDS" India section, edited by James A Wolsten-croft, S A Hussain and C K Varshney.)

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Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD - 500 012. INDIA.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Published 9/XI/1990

Nos. 28 to 35

May - November 1990

PROGRAMME FOR NOVEMBER' 1990

INDOOR MEETING:- Venue: The CCF's office opposite the Reserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6:30 p.m.

13th (Tuesday) :- Film Show and discussion.

OUTDOOR MEETING:- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7:00 a.m.

18th (Sunday) : Palmakole Tank.

This will be a half-day trip.

NEWS

* Since 1969 when Dr. Salim Ali's BIRDS OF KERALA was published, various species of birds not included in the book and the breeding of some more birds not recorded in the book, have been recorded by others. Mr. Sashi Kumar, 9 Subhash Nagar, Cannanore - 670 002 and some others are bringing out a supplement to Salim Ali's book and any member who has any date on sightings or breedings of birds not found in BIRDS OF KERALA are requested to convey it to Mr. Sashi Kumar direct.

(MADRAS NATURALISTS' SOCIETY Bulletin. Vol 12 Nos 5&6 - May&June'90)

* "The heaviest Pintail so far recorded is a bird weighing 12½ tolas (about 7 oz.) shot by W. Gaye, at Secunderabad on the 6th January 1890. The average weight is about 4 oz."

(JOURNAL OF THE BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY. Vol XLIV p. 126.)

* "There are two interesting observations on our scientific front. At our ringing station at Point Calimere a Lesser Sand Plover ringed by us on 27 NOV 1971 was recovered on 3 JAN 1990. The recovery, after a lapse of 18 years, 2 months and 10 days is a record. Similarly, our member Nitin Pandya recorded sighting of Bengal Floricals in Arunachal Pradesh - the first record for that area."

(BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY Circular dated 24/7/1990).

* The BSAP is in receipt of a letter from Dr. S. Subramanya of Bangalore, who says, "A few of us from the local birdwatchers club have taken up a survey to ascertain the status of the Yellowthroated Bulbul (YTB) and its habitat. As you must be aware YTB is endemic to South India and is confined mainly to hills. Very little is known about this species and a study of its distribution, habitat preference, behaviour, relative abundance, food and nesting habits may go a long way in the understanding of the species. I am writing this letter to seek your collaboration for a joint project on YTB. Our group here in Bangalore will survey the hills and hill ranges in Karnataka. Is it possible for you to take up a similar survey in Andhra Pradesh? We intend to publish the results of our surveys in the Journal of the BNHS jointly, with your cooperation. Please let me know if you can pitch in with us."

Members interested in this project may get in touch with the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Siraj Taher.

* POCHARAM RESERVOIR

LOCATION:- 18°08'N, 77°57'E; on the Manjira River, 85 km northwest of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

AREA:- 20,000 ha.

ALTITUDE:- 450 m. **WETLAND TYPE:-** Water storage reservoirs, dams.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE:- A large water storage reservoir on Manjira River, about 70 km downstream from Manjira Barrage. The reservoir is situated in undulating hills with dry deciduous forest and scrub jungle. The lake varies in extent from 15,000 to 20,000 ha depending upon the season and fluctuations in rainfall. It reaches a maximum depth of about 6-7 m, and is alkaline with a pH of 7.5-8.0.

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS:- Rather dry tropical monsoon climate, with temperatures ranging from 10-41°C.

PRINCIPAL VEGETATION:- No information is available on the aquatic vegetation. The lake is surrounded by cultivation with scrub jungle at 50-200 m from the shoreline.

LAND TENURE:- The reservoir is state owned.

CONSERVATION MEASURES TAKEN:- Part of the reservoir is included in the Pocharam Sanctuary (12,964 ha), established in 1952 and managed by the Divisional Forest Officer, Medak.

LAND USE:- Water supply for irrigation and domestic use. Forestry exploitation and agriculture in surrounding areas.

DISTURBANCES AND THREATS:- Forestry activities in the watershed.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUES:- The reservoir provides an important water supply for the surrounding areas.

FAUNA:- The lake is known to support a wide variety of both resident and migratory waterfowl, but little information is available. Over 10,000 waterfowl of at least 53 species were present in January 1987, including:

90 herons and egrets of 7 species

100 Platalea leucorodia

560 Tadorna ferruginea

800 Anas penelope

960 Anas crecca

1,400 Anas acuta

760 Anas clypeata

400 Aythya ferina

840 Aythya fuligula

100 Anthropoides virgo

50 Anastomus oscitans

620 Anser indicus

630 Nettapus coromandelicus

300 Anas strepera

1,200 Anas poecilorhyncha

700 Anas querquedula

180 Netta rufina

50 Aythya nyroca

50 Grus grus

9 Rhynchops albigollis

Large numbers of shorebirds of at least 14 species were also present but no count was possible.

SPECIAL FLORAL VALUES:- None known.

RESEARCH AND FACILITIES:- A mid-winter waterfowl census was carried out in January 1987.

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION:- It regularly supports substantial numbers of individuals from particular groups of waterfowl indicative of wetland values, productivity or diversity.

SOURCE:- Rajeev Mathew.

(Extracted from "A DIRECTORY OF ASIAN WETLANDS" India section, edited by James A wolstencroft, S A Hussain and C K Varshney.)

* NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRDWATCHER'S SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH WILL BE HELD ON 10th DECEMBER 1990, AT 6.30 P.M. IN THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS, ANDHRA PRADESH, A.P. FOREST DEPARTMENT, OPPOSITE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA, SAIFABAD, HYDERABAD. MEMBERS MAY PLEASE TREAT THIS AS AN INDIVIDUAL NOTICE AS PER RULE 24 OF THE BYE-LAWS OF THE SOCIETY.

PREPARING THE PERFECT TRIP REPORT

Those who birdwatch in the Oriental region often subsequently prepare private reports on their observations. Simon Harrap - somebody who has in the past made extensive use of this type of unpublished records as part of a more detailed study - outlines how anyone, even those making only a brief visit, may contribute to the understanding of Oriental birds.

Birdwatchers visiting a new or unfamiliar part of the Orient are in a position to make valuable contributions to our knowledge of Oriental birds, especially of status, distribution and habits. Even on a short visit to an area, for example on an expedition, holiday or in the course of work, all OBC members can make noteworthy observations. It is apparent, however, that many pertinent records do not reach the notebook, and of those that do, too few are written up and made available to a wider public. Such records do not only have a scientific value, they contribute information necessary for effective conservation strategies to be formulated. That good use can be made of such reports has been demonstrated, for example, by Carol and Tim Inskipps' A Guide to the birds of Nepal (1985).

It is unfashionable nowadays for journals to publish systematic lists of observations from a specific area, and only extracts of the most notable records are likely to find an outlet this way, unless it is a very poorly known region. The usual vehicle for records which, whilst not outstanding, are still extremely valuable, is a 'trip report'. This is an unpublished account of a trip, produced to document sightings and to assist future birdwatchers visiting the area, usually distributed informally to interested parties. Most commonly, trip reports are written by visitors from outside the Oriental region, but they are also useful tools for those resident in the region who are visiting new or unfamiliar areas.

The starting point in the planning of a trip is to research thoroughly the ornithology of the region to be visited. Handbooks and field guides, as well as unpublished reports of previous trips to the area, are an obvious beginning. For many localities however, more detailed information has been published (though often in old or obscure journals). Papers detailing collecting expeditions, and regional or locality checklists can all be used to determine which species to expect, which are the notable absentees to look out for, and to provide a basis for an assessment of changes in status.

Once in the field, it is important to identify the birds correctly. This may seem obvious, but too often it is apparent that the high standards that one would apply at home are let slip in a new locality. It is well to remember that some Oriental species/species groups are very difficult to identify, especially without previous experience. There is no substitute for detailed observations and notes taken on the spot to back up a record.

The next important fact is the bird's whereabouts. The exact location, with the distance and direction from the nearest town if it is not well known, is crucial. Note that there is no 'correct' English spelling for many translated Oriental names, because there is no exact equivalent in English. Names should be extracted from the best map available, and full details of all maps used should be quoted. Altitude is too often ignored, yet it is a key factor affecting the distribution of many Oriental birds. Altitudes can be read from some maps, but these are often incorrect and should be used with caution. An altimeter, though also subject to inaccuracy, can be extremely useful in this respect. Also important is the habitat. Although on many occasions none but a trained botanist is in a position to distinguish between the many forest types, categories such as evergreen or deciduous can be applied by most birdwatchers. Also of value are notes on the gradient and the aspect (i.e. north or south facing slope) of the area, if appropriate.

The bird has been identified, we know where it is, but what is it doing? Some aspects of behaviour are only worth noting if part of a detailed, long-term study. The random and unsystematic collection of observations of feeding behaviour, for example, seldom bears fruit outside these parameters, and usually tends to over-emphasise the unusual, even the bizarre. However, one area where a chance observation can have great value is in an analysis of breeding distribution. Often a major frustration is the lack of published or unpublished material with which to define a species' status within the area it is recorded. This is as true for the commonest species as for the rare. Migrants, both geographical and altitudinal, are a particular problem.

The criteria used in breeding-bird-atlas schemes in the temperate zone to establish probable and confirmed breeding must be used with caution in the Oriental region. Song and territorial display, for example, cannot be used as indicators of probable breeding: many species sing in their winter quarters, especially immediately prior to departure, and some also defend winter territories. The following criteria have thus been adapted from Sharrock (1976).

Probable Breeding

- * Courtship and display.
- * Adults carrying food.
- * Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults (including distraction display or injury-feigning), suggesting probable presence of nest or young nearby.
- * Visiting probable nest site.
- * Nest building or excavating nest hole.

Confirmed Breeding

- * Adults entering and leaving nest site in circumstances indicating occupies nest.
- * Adults carrying faecal sac.
- * Nest and eggs, or bird sitting and not disturbed.
- * Nest with young or downy young of ducks, gamebirds, waders etc.
- * Recently fledged young (nidicolous species).
- * Used nest or eggshells found. This is obviously only useful if the material can be conclusively identified.

Observations of any of these are worth recording, and should be included in any trip report. It is also worth describing details of any other aspects of breeding biology, which is poorly known for many Oriental species. The same applies to nests and eggs (here a camera is particularly useful).

The information is safely in the notebook, but in what form is it best presented in a report? The following general rules apply:

1. Give the names of all the observers involved, and the name and address of one to whom enquiries can be sent.
2. Specify the map(s) from which the site names are taken. If they are not on any map, give a precise location, preferably the co-ordinates.
3. Give a detailed itinerary.
4. List species in systematic order and state the book or checklist (preferably the most modern and relevant) from which the order was taken. Give both the vernacular and the scientific name, again following a stated reference.
5. Unusual records and those of rarities should be accompanied by further details, including a description.

Of course, a report is not simply designed to detail one's ornithological observations. It is also usually produced to help subsequent visitors to the area. The best way of doing this is to go through each site visited, giving:

1. A general description, with details of habitat and the main attractions.
2. Access information, including, where necessary, a map, and details concerning any formalities which have to be completed to enter the area.
3. Details of the accommodation (and how to book if necessary), and the availability of food.
4. Notable species seen, and how to see them, with comments on abundance. Previous sightings of note.

A day-by-day species-list is generally the least useful format for a report, both for the researcher and the intending visitor.

If possible, type the report. If this is not possible, write clearly, paying special attention to making bird and place names legible (print these if necessary). Preferably, use A4 paper (295 x 210 mm), and always leave a margin of at least 15 mm along every side. Black ink is preferable (a carbon ribbon is best if you type) and remember to number each page. To reduce costs, be as economical as possible with space (as long as you are still clear); if the facility is available, a well-produced report can usually be reduced to half-size when it is photocopied, getting two pages on to one A4 sheet. Large, scrawled handwriting and huge maps with an excess of blank spaces simply waste resources.

Finally, having produced a report it should be distributed widely. National park headquarters (if appropriate) and national conservation, wildlife or environmental organisations (both governmental and non-governmental) should be sent copies. Finally, the OBC would be pleased to receive a copy of any trip report, including those already produced, for its library.

Acknowledgements

Mark Cocker, Richard Grimmett and Tim Inskipp made valuable comments on the first draft of this note, for which I thank them.

References

Sharrock, J.T.R. (1976). The atlas of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland. Berkhamstead, British Trust for Ornithology.

Simon Harrop, 177 Antrobus Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B21 9NU, UK.

(Courtesy: Oriental Bird Club Bulletin No. 7).

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Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD - 500 012, INDIA.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Ind 18/4/2001
Published 27.5.91

No. 36 - 40

December 1990 - April 1991

EDITORIAL

Here is a type of birding very few among us indulge in. In a way it is a mingling of both the activities of listing and behaviour-watching. Dr. Salim Ali's note dates to 1935 while the latter is more recent.

" One remark regarding the 'localised forest associations' might here prove of interest. In regard to the South-Indian species of Tree-Pie, I find it has been commented by several authors that it associates habitually with the Racket-tailed Drongo. Whenever I came across the Racket-tailed Drongo in the Hyderabad State, in 9 cases out of 10 it was as a member of these localised forest associations of which other unfailing members were Indian Tree Pie and Jungle Babbler. After careful watching with a view to discover the reason of this association, I venture to suggest that it is merely a convergence of interests - apparently an abundance of food - that brings the different species together. This doubtless is the explanation for the alleged habitual association of the Southern Tree-Pie and Racket-tailed Drongo also. I had frequent opportunities of observing that in these gatherings the component members profited not a little by the efforts of others. For instance a Grey Tit, a Nuthatch or a Woodpecker scuttling along the trunk or branches of a tree flushed a moth resting securely upon the protectingly coloured bark which was promptly seized by a Drongo in waiting hard by, or a smaller insect similarly chased and captured by a Minivet or Flycatcher. Babblers rummaging down below among the fallen leaves also frequently discharged the function of beaters by disturbing winged insects seeking refuge on the ground." (Ali, Salim (1935): The Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey. Part I. Journal of the Bom. Nat. Hist. Soc. 36/2/356-390.)

" Mixed-species (winter) flocks include anywhere from a few to more than a dozen different species. They seem drawn to a place by the sound and movement of other birds feeding, and benefit from the comfort and safety of a quiet sunny spot, abundant food, and plenty of sharp eyes to watch for danger. You can observe similar behaviour when several species come to your feeder at the same time. But when many species gather spontaneously to feed and mingle in some wooded spot, with no food put out by people, it's different somehow. We can enjoy more of their natural wild behaviour, even though we still don't understand all of its meaning. So look for these special times, since they take place frequently in cold weather months when birds are not establishing and maintaining nesting territories. We only need to recognize what's happening, then stop to enjoy the show. Try not to walk into the centre of a feeding flock that has already gathered, or they'll scatter. Most wild birds leave immediately and won't return soon if frightened, even if they're hungry. Don't try to call them to you at these times - oh, a few may come closer briefly, but most will become disturbed and leave. Just sit or stand, motionless, and watch, and instead of quickly identifying the birds and moving on, get to know their calls and behaviour. Better yet, by observation, try to find some favourite feeding place in a park or woods and wait for a flock to come to you. You can almost count on the best time to be a sunny, calm midmorning or afternoon following cold, windy, or rainy weather. Remember, you're not looking for a flock of only sparrows, only starlings, pigeons, or any other single species. You are looking for a mixture of different species of wild birds actively feeding together in the same place. At these times you're likely to be rewarded by seeing things you've never experienced before. One thing to notice is the continuous, low, satisfied feeding sounds. (Have you ever heard a bunch of baby chicks feeding happily around a mother hen?) The bird sounds are not the same ones that you normally hear them make. Some give only part of their full song, but in a muted or minor key. In this setting, the 'iora', which is normally quite loud, probably won't be detected by human hearing much beyond the feeding group. Many times you'll see or hear other species of birds in the vicinity that don't join the feeding activity because they simply are not mixed flock feeders. You never know what surprise might be waiting as you enjoy watching a mixed flock in some park or woods. If you don't already know about this method of birding, please try it some time. It may add a new dimension and insight to your enjoyment of nature." (Bulluck, D (1990): Mixed winter flocks. BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST. Nov/Dec 1990 p.44-49.)

* In its Annual General Meeting held on 18th March 1991 at Mr Sushil Kapadia's residence, members of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh elected the following Executive Committee.

PRESIDENT:	Mr Pushp Kumar, IFS (Retd)	Ph: 248825
VICE-PRESIDENTS:	Major A A Aziz	Ph: 520755
	Mrs G S Plumber	Ph: 232520
EX-OFFICIO:	Chief Wildlife Warden, Govt. of A.P.	
HON. SECRETARY:	Mr Siraj A Taher	Ph: 37252
JT. HON. SEC:	Mr Rajiv Mathew	Ph: 210721
HON. TREASURER:	Mr Tim Galbraith	Ph: 232982
MEMBERS:	Mr Aasheesh Pittie	Ph: 43264
	Mr M S Kulkarni	Ph: 233336
	Mr Ashfaq Ahmed	Ph: 223509
	Mrs Geeta Raghavan	Ph: 866550

Subsequently, the Executive Committee decided to form the following 6 sub-committees for ease of functioning.

- 1) Fund-raising & Membership: Mr Tim Galbraith & Mr M S Kulkarni.
- 2) Publications: Mr Aasheesh Pittie.
- 3) Programmes for Members: Mr Siraj Taher & Mr Rajiv Mathew.
- 4) Other Programmes: Mrs G S Plumber.
- 5) Publicity: Mrs Geeta Raghavan.
- 6) Projects: Mr Pushp Kumar.

* Members will be pleased to know that Mr Tim Galbraith has very kindly offered to hold Executive Committee meetings at his office premises till a more permanent place is located. His office address is PRINTLAND, 4-1-833, 1st Floor, behind Palace Talkies, Abids, HYDERABAD - 500 001. A notice board will also be put up here for informing members about Society programmes, etc. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETS ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH.

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Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, HYDERABAD - 500 012. INDIA.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD

Ind 18/2/2001
Published 27.5.1991

No. 41

May 1991

E D I T O R I A L

The recent report (THE HINDU 9-4-'91) about hand-reared Barn Owls Tyto alba being introduced on the oil palm plantations in the Andamans to control the proliferating rodent population should be of interest to bird lovers. The Barn Owl Research Programme (sponsored by a company involved in pest control) at the AVC College, Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu, has launched this pilot programme as they expect that such a method of pest control will not endanger the fragile ecology of the Andaman Islands.

The astounding fecundity of rats and mice, in the absence of natural control, and the significant damage that they cause to agricultural produce are well known. An effective check on the proliferation of these destructive rodents is provided by the predation on them by nocturnal owls and diurnal birds of prey. Barn owls are considered to be particularly effective since their diet comprises mainly of these rodents.

There are two races of the barn owl in India: The Indian Barn Owl Tyto alba stertens which is widely distributed, and the Andaman Barn Owl T. a. deroepstorffi which is restricted to the Andamans and reported to be very scarce. The habits of the two races are similar except that the breeding of the Andaman race is not known.

Presumably the owls being introduced will be of the race stertens. If the other race still occurs on the islands, the question of the effects of interaction of the races will have to be considered. Being at the top of the food chain, owls are indicators of the health of the environment. If the causes for the decline of the native race still persist, the introduced race may also not be able to establish itself. Have any studies been done to ascertain these causes? Moreover, as the owls being introduced have been hand-reared, it has to be seen whether they can revert to the wild and survive to breed successfully.

But the birds are to be released on plantations, which may prove to be a less alien environment than the natural forest for these hand-reared specimens. Some care is also being taken to adapt these birds to the local conditions before they are released.

If successful, the programme has the potential to bring about far reaching changes in the methods of pest control used in India. A shift to biological control of pests will provide welcome relief from the pollution being caused by the present use of chemical pesticides.

The important question, however, is whether oil palm plantations should be encouraged in an admittedly fragile ecosystem, which is already under great pressure?

* * * * *

P R O G R A M M E

A 4 month programme is given below. Some of the items are not yet finalised, but the dates are confirmed. In subsequent issues of PITTA we will give the updated programmes. Members will have to make their own arrangements of transport to reach the venue for birding. Venues will be informed via the PITTA and the noticeboard in Printland office. Indoor Meetings will be held at GOLDEN THRESHOLD, Opp., C L S Bookshop, Nampally Station Road, from 6 pm.

<u>MAY 1991:</u>	06th:	Executive Committee meeting.
	13th:	Indoor Meeting: Talk by Mr M S Kulkarni on nesting birds of Nehru Zoological Park.
	19th:	Field Trip: Chiran Palace Grounds, Jubilee Hills. Please assemble at Jubilee Hills Check Post by 8 am.
	27th:	Indoor Meeting: Talk by Mr Aasheesh Pittie on Bird Calls.
<u>JUN 1991:</u>	03rd:	Executive Committee meeting.
	05th:	Indoor Meeting: Audio-visual by Mr Pushp Kumar.
	16th:	Field Trip: Nehru Zoological Park. Please assemble near the Ticketing office in the Park by 8 am.
	24th:	Indoor Meeting: Film show.
<u>JUL 1991:</u>	01st:	Executive Committee meeting.
	08th:	Indoor Meeting: Audio-visual by Mr. Tim Galbraith on Birds of Australia.
	14th:	Field Trip: Hyderabad University Campus, Gachi Bowli. SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION.
	22nd:	Indoor Meeting: Film show.
<u>AUG 1991:</u>	05th:	Executive Committee meeting.
	12th:	Indoor Meeting: Programme to be finalised.
	18th:	Field Trip: Shamirpet. Details in subsequent issues of PITTA.
	26th:	Indoor Meeting: Programme to be finalised.

* The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) of United States has approved a neem-based biological pesticide developed by Tata Oil Mills Co. Ltd. (TOMCO) for use on a wide range of food crops. The natural pesticide based on neem extracts underwent extensive field trials in the U.S. It has been cleared for use on outdoor and greenhouse crops. TOMCO has plans to set up a plant to manufacture the product on a commercial scale. Neem extracts produced by various firms in India are under investigation in agricultural institutes in several western countries as well as the Soviet Union. Many agricultural universities in the U.S. have conducted studies on neem compounds and have established the efficacy of azadirachtin, the active ingredient in neem in fighting pests on a wide variety of vegetation. But this is the first occasion when a neem compound has been cleared by EPA. The stage is now set for use of the natural pesticide by farmers themselves. (THE ECONOMIC TIMES. 19 Apr 1991).

* * * * *

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EDITORS: Aasheesh Pittie, Pranay Waghray, Humayun Taher.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Ind 18/12/2001

No. 42

June 1991

EDITORIAL

The open areas around Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad contain the vegetation of the old Deccan Plateau. One such portion of about 96 acres in the Cheran Area is to be protected by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department as a Forest Park.

After the recent visit to the Park on 19th May 1991, the Park has been put on our Society's birding map. Even during this hot season, and despite the late hour, some interesting sightings were made including the Indian Cuckoo Cuculus micropterus, Shikra Accipiter badius, Common Wood-Shrike Tephrodornis pondicerianus, Hoopoe Upupa epops, and plenty of the introduced Peafowl Pavo cristatus.

Forest Department staff could identify the tracks and droppings of Chinkara Gazella gazella. Porcupine Hystrix indica quills were seen and Hare Lepus nigricollis droppings were plentifully spread over the open grasslands in the park. Observation over a period of time will reveal its faunal diversity in detail.

The flora is thorny scrub and also includes a wide variety of trees, bushes and grasses.

The area in the vicinity of the proposed park is fast developing into housing colonies. Erosion of soil, depletion of ground water and a general rise in the ambient temperature are likely consequences of such development.

Much can be said for conserving a part of this type of habitat within the city. First, the park will provide an effective buffer against overcrowding; the value of this verdure, a veritable green lung, and the resulting fresh air can be appreciated when we look at the more congested parts of the city. Second, rain water percolating through the soil of the park will continue to recharge underground water reservoirs which are now so heavily relied upon by the people in the area. Third, an important type of habitat will be conserved along with its typical flora and fauna. Fourth, the continuing presence of the diverse flora and fauna will prove to be a good indicator of the health of the local environment; any significant change in their diversity or populations can sound a timely warning about any degradation of the environment. And fifth, it will be a place where tired city-dwellers can go to refresh and re-energise themselves at an affordable price!

There is some pressure on this land to convert it into yet another housing colony. If this happens, the loss of the park will be deeply felt in the not so distant future.

PROGRAMME

JUNE 1991:
03rd: Executive Committee meeting.
05th: World Environment Day Celebrations.
- Prize distribution function for BSAP's essay-writing competition for under-18s. Topic "Importance of Natural Environment for Man's Survival."
- AVP by Shri Pushp Kumar.
- sale of T-shirts !
16th: Field Trip: Nehru Zoo Park. Please assemble near the ticket off. in the NZP by 8.00 a.m. It is a ½ day trip.
24th: Indoor Meeting: Talk by Mr Aasheesh Pittie on Bird Calls.

JULY 1991:
01st: Executive Committee meeting.
08th: Indoor Meeting: Farewell to Dr. L D Swindale, Director-General, ICRISAT.
14th: Field Trip: Hyderabad University Campus, Gachi Bowli. SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION.
22nd: Indoor Meeting: AVP by Mr. Tim Galbraith on Birds of Australia.

AUGUST 1991:
05th: Executive Committee meeting.
12th: Indoor Meeting: film show.
18th: Field Trip: Shamirpet. Details in subsequent issues of PITTA.
26th: Indoor Meeting: Film show.

* Indoor Meetings will be held at GOLDEN THRESHOLD, Opp., C.L.S. Bookshop, Nampally Station Road, from 6 p.m. sharp.

* In its meeting of 27th May, members stood in silence for 2 minutes in the memory of the brutally assassinated leader, Rajiv Gandhi and passed a condolence resolution later, which is being sent to the bereaved family.

* Members should note that the meeting of 5th JUNE is an INDOOR MEETING of considerable importance and should attend it in full strength. For the field trip on 16th June, members are requested to be present on time to see the activities of birds at nests, being studied by some members of the society. Hopefully by then the monsoon would have set in and nesting activities begun in full swing!

* LOOK OUT FOR NEW FEATURES IN THE PITTA!

* * * * *

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD *Jul 17/21/2001*

No. 43

July 1991

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY : 1991

The World Environment Day was observed by the B.S.A.P. on 5th June 1991, with a well attended meeting which focused attention on the current environmental problems. The Society's President, Shri Pushp Kumar, addressed the gathering at Golden Threshold.

The World Environment Day every year has a different topic for discussion. This year it was the climate. Shri Pushp Kumar's very interesting talk on the climate as related to environment, explained how environmental damage and misuse of natural resources automatically affects the weather in an adverse manner.

After Shri Pushp Kumar had finished his talk, members were encouraged to air their views. Mr. Sabahuddin Ahmed outlined steps that he thought should be taken for the conservation of our natural environment. He illustrated his views with examples of steps taken in the U.S.A. and Europe. His views were enlightening.

After this talk Mr. Balachander spoke on the subject. The gist of his long speech was that the city dwellers cannot see the relation between weather and environment. A man who sees only buildings and concrete day after day cannot be expected to realise the importance of natural vegetation in the weather cycle. His talk made sense and the only suggestions forthcoming were the obvious "grow more trees and educate the masses."

Then a few random points were made by various members. Meanwhile the topic under discussion, the weather, gave us a treat and rain lashed the city for more than an hour, fortunately without any major power failure.

Earlier the Society had arranged an essay writing competition on the topic "Conservation of our natural environment for human welfare." There had been some response to this contest which had been announced through the local papers. On the day of the meeting, after the discussions were over, Shri Pushp Kumar presented the prizes to the winners.

On this day the Society had placed an environmentally topical advertisement in the DECCAN CHRONICLE daily. This ad., was released to commemorate the World Environment Day. It showed a photograph and a caption related to environmental concern.

Meanwhile, after the felicitation of the prize winners, there was a sale of T-shirts bearing the B.S.A.P. logo and also a few bearing the slogan of the 'Vulture Culture' organisation.

The film show that followed, courtesy the Forest Department of Andhra Pradesh, was on the language of animals and was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone present. Only one film could be screened however, due to the increasing intensity of rain.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by the Honorary Secretary, Shri Siraj Taher.

* * * *

PROGRAMME

JULY 1991: 01st: Executive Committee meeting.
 08th: Indoor Meeting: Farewell to Dr. L.D.
 Swindale, Director-General, ICRISAT.
 14th: Field Trip: Hyderabad University
 Campus, Gachi Bowli.
 22nd: Indoor Meeting: AVP by Mr. Tim Gal-
 braith on Birds of Australia.

AUGUST 1991:

05th:	Executive Committee meeting.
12th:	<u>Indoor Meeting:</u> Film show.
18th:	<u>Field Trip:</u> Shamirpet. Details in subsequent issues of PITTA.
26th:	<u>Indoor Meeting:</u> Film show.

* Indoor meetings will be held at GOLDEN THRESHOLD, Opposite C.L.S. Bookshop, Nampally Station Road, from 6 p.m. sharp.

* Members with ideas and suggestions are welcome to attend the Executive Committee meetings at Mr. Tim Galbraith's office.

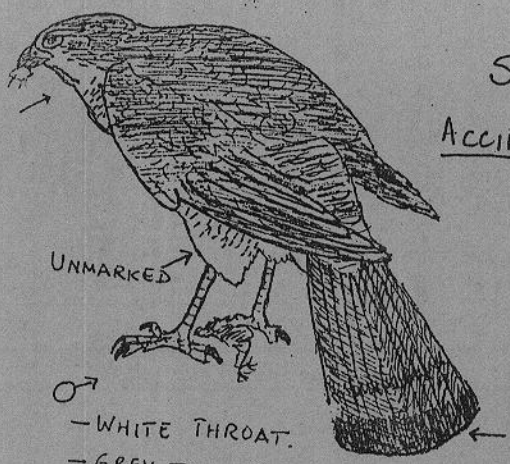
* Considering the recent proliferation of suitable waters in the form of reservoirs and gravel-workings, it is perhaps surprising that the nesting Pochard population has not shown the concurrent considerable expansion described for the Gadwal (Fox 1988). Most Aythya species, however, use more stable (i.e. more predictable and perhaps vegetationally stable) wetlands than do dabbling ducks (Johnson & Grier 1988). Generally, the Pochard might not be expected to be opportunistic in colonising newly created sites, but rather to utilise established suitable wetlands to which it becomes site-loyal. Its sporadic breeding is likely to be a result more of fluctuations in breeding success at suitable sites than of dramatic changes in the distribution of the species. Interestingly, some observers have suggested at least 4 common reasons for the variable nature of breeding at many sites; disturbance, water-level fluctuations, nest-site competition and predation. The Pochard does appear to be a shy species, intolerant of water-based leisure sports, activities which are often characteristic during the summer of sites which are less disturbed in winter and accordingly hold wintering concentrations of this duck. It has also been suggested that competition, particularly with the aggressive Coot, for nest sites within reedbeds and other emergent vegetation may likewise be a problem. Finally, the picture emerges from many sites that, although broods frequently appear, their subsequent survival rate is poor; several bird reports suggest that pike or mink have been involved in the loss of ducklings, but direct evidence is often lacking.

- Fox, A. D. (1991): History of the Pochard breeding in Britain. BRITISH BIRDS. Vol. 84 No. 3 March 1991. pps. 83-98.

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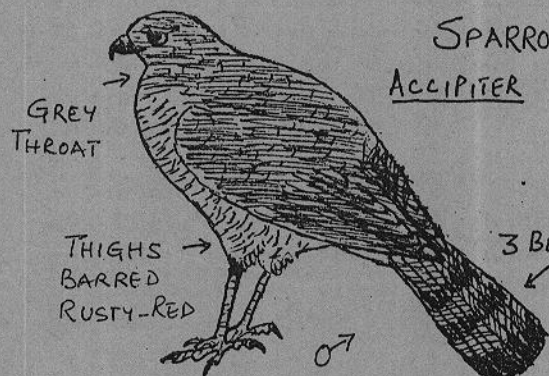
SHIKRA
ACCIPITER BADIUS

- ♂
- UNMARKED
 - WHITE THROAT.
 - GREY TAIL; BROAD BLACK BAND AT TIP.
 - OVERALL GREY ABOVE; WHITE BELOW WITH RUSTY-BROWN BARS.



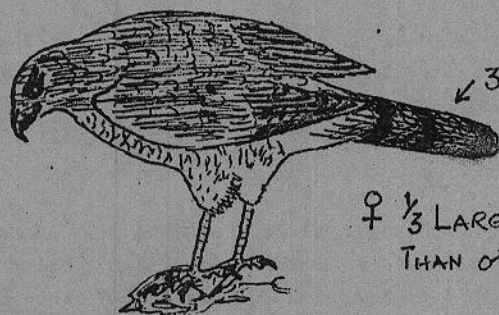
- ♀
- BROWN ABOVE; WHITE BELOW WITH RUSTY-BROWN BARS.
 - TAIL BROWN WITH 4 BLACK BARS.

$\frac{1}{3}$ LARGER THAN ♂



SPARROW-HAWK
ACCIPITER VIRGATUS

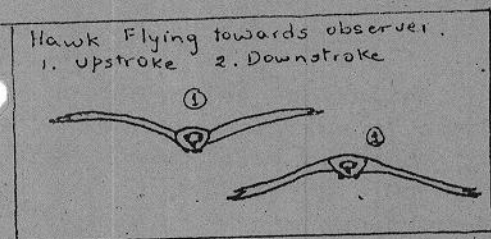
- ♂
- GREY ABOVE; WHITE BELOW BARRED RUSTY-RED.



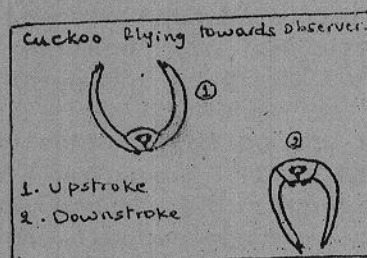
- ♀
- BROWN ABOVE; WHITE BELOW CROSS-BARRED RUSTY-RED.

$\frac{1}{3}$ LARGER THAN ♂

* CUCKOOS HAVE STRAIGHT BILLS: HAWKS, CURVED ONES.

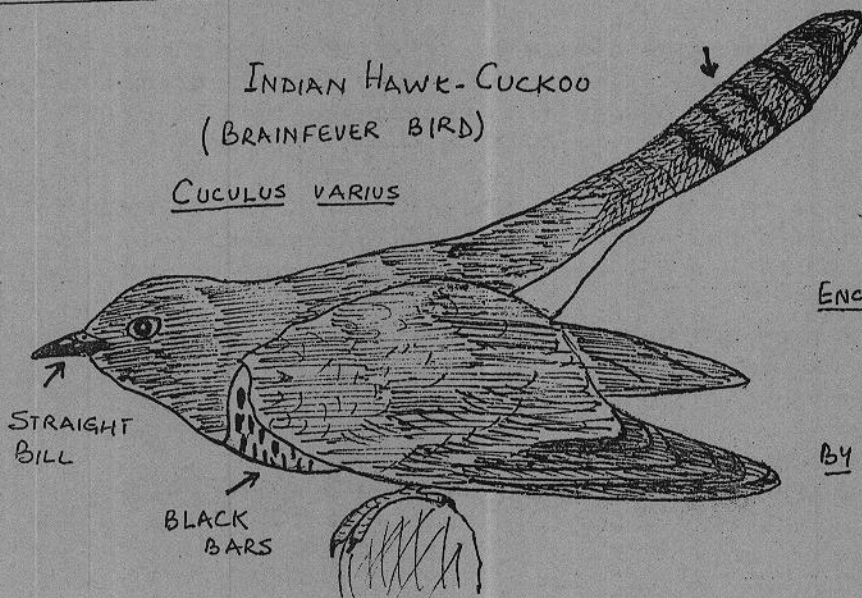


FLIGHT



INDIAN HAWK-CUCKOO
(BRAINFEVER BIRD)

CUCULUS VARIUS



- GREY THROAT.
- SHAKES TAIL FROM SIDE TO SIDE ON ALIGHTING.

ENCL. WITH: PITTA: Bulletin of
the Birdwatcher's Soc. of A.P.
No. 43 July 1991.

BY: HUMAYUN TAHER.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

Ind 17/4/2001

No. 44

August, 1991

EDITORIAL

On Golden Pond is a pheasant-tailed jacana - with long, thin, spreadeagled toes distributing body weight, on a fluid surface, preventing submergence. Its nasal mew draws our attention to the, astonishingly precocious, furry offspring just behind it. Purple moorhens skulk in the thick grass on the fringes, fussing around their black-billed young. Indian moorhens float placidly on the still water, occasionally calling shrilly, to hidden fledglings. A pied kingfisher hurries up, its wings chopping the air into fragments of white and black. Poised above water, intent upon the downward pointed bill, it checks in mid-dive and lights upon a bare limb hard by. The laugh of a goldenbacked woodpecker shatters the stillness like breaking glass. Eyes turn towards the babool grove whence it comes, like maniacal laughter. Suddenly, the incessant, ventriloquial plaint of *cacomantis passerinus* is discerned. What pain does this parasitic bird have, to warrant such pathetic cries? In a gulmohar a family of white-headed babblers, victims of parasitism, are busy building a nest. In the crocodile moat, where typha proliferate, the weaver bird family is busy procreating too. Commonest are the streaked weaver birds whose nests dangle from inter-woven tips of cattail leaves, the innate springiness of which holds them aloft! An unused, dry nest of a baya hangs from the peepal, mute, intricate remnant of the efforts of a bird which must have been hounded out of here by its congeners! A pair of the rarer (and of uncertain status) blackthroated weavers comes furtively from another pond, for building material, which is carried back in a streaming strip of green! Two bitterns are spotted, contorted into mindboggling postures when gazing at the water or the epitome of ramrod symmetry when observing intruders. The chestnut and the yellow.

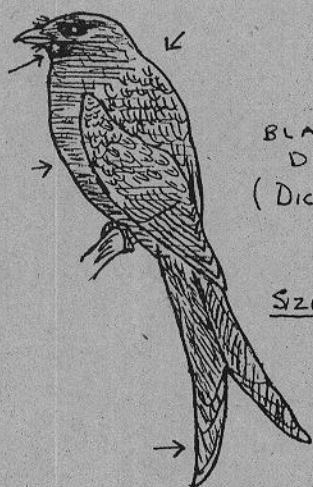
These are some observations on a field trip of the society to the Nehru Zoo Park on 16/6/91. Most of us stop right here in our birding. Of course there is nothing wrong in anthropomorphism or even simply birding for pleasure! But just try getting into it a bit deeper. The opportunities for bird study in India are enormous. Some points to ponder on the above notes; When will the colour of the young purple moorhen's bill turn red? When does the young jacana get an adult's plumage? Which other fish feeders come here besides the kingfisher? How do the birds share the pond and why? Which are the different calling posts of the cuckoo, to help ascertain its territory? How do the bitterns divide the pond between them? How do the colony nesting bayas behave towards each other? ANY TAKERS?

AUGUST 1991 05th: Executive Committee meeting.
 12th: Indoor Meeting: Audio-visual program by
 Shri Pushp Kumar.
 18th: Field Trip: Shamirpet.
 26th: Indoor Meeting: Talk by Dr. Sudhakar
 Marathe.

NOTES & NEWS

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EDITORS: Aasheesh Pittie, Pranay Waghray, Humayun Taher.

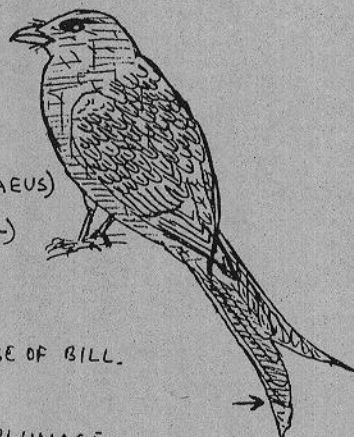
DRONGOS



BLACK
DRONGO
(*DICRURUS ADSIMILIS*)

SIZE: BULBUL (+)

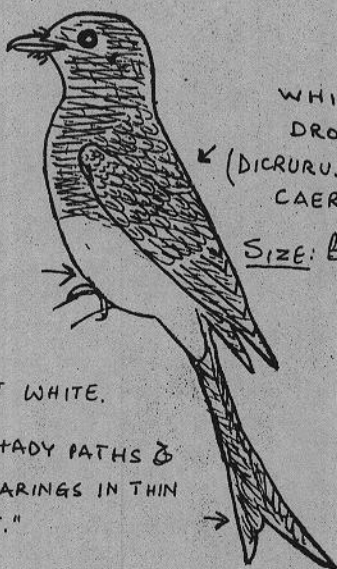
- * BLACK OVERALL.
- * DEEPLY FORKED TAIL.
- * WHITE SPOT AT BASE OF BILL.
- * OPEN HABITAT.
- * RESIDENT.



GREY
DRONGO
(*DICRURUS LEUCOPHAEUS*)

SIZE: BULBUL (+)

- * NO SPOT AT BASE OF BILL.
- * RED EYE.
- * SOOTY-GREY PLUMAGE.
- * SLIMMER BODY, LONGER & DEEPER-FORKED TAIL THAN BLACK DRONGO.
- * WOODED HABITAT.
- * WINTER MIGRANT.

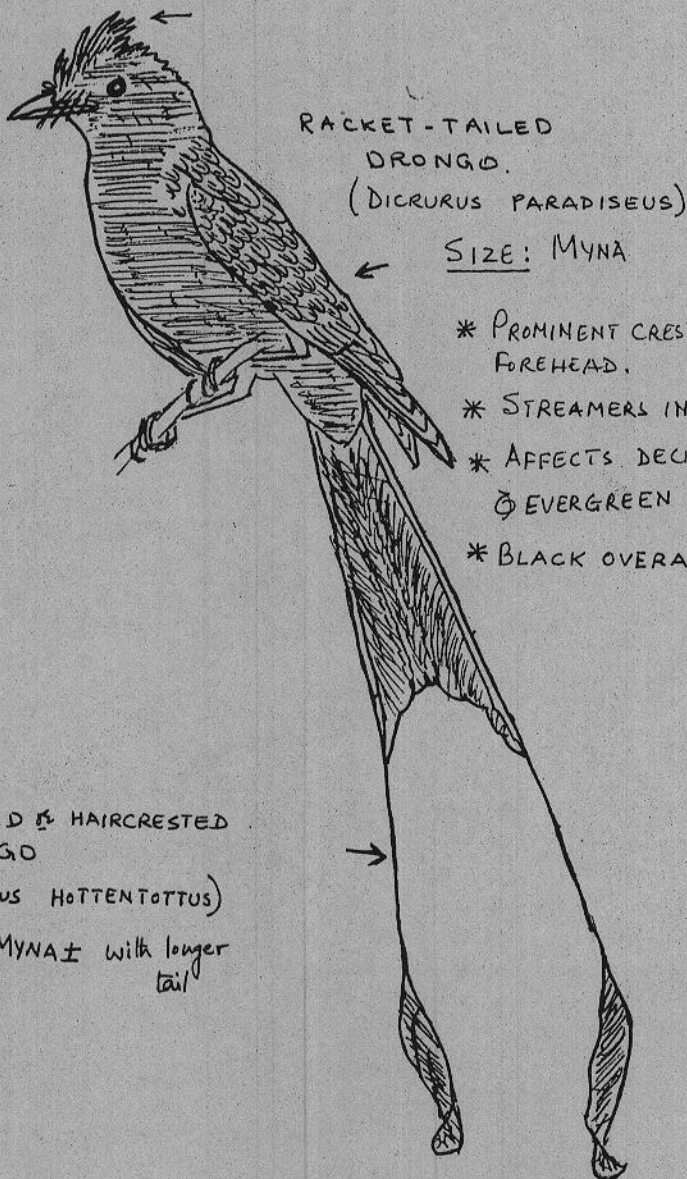


WHITE-BELLIED
DRONGO.

(*DICRURUS CAERULESCENS*)

SIZE: BULBUL (+)

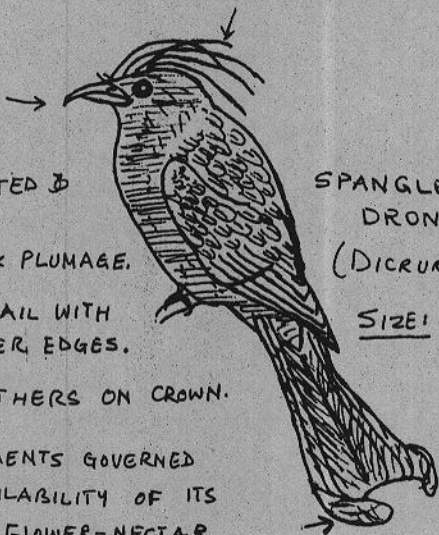
- * BELLY & VENT WHITE.
- * PARTIAL TO SHADY PATHS & EDGES OF CLEARINGS IN THIN TREE JUNGLE."



RACKET-TAILED
DRONGO.
(*DICRURUS PARADISEUS*)

SIZE: MYNA

- * PROMINENT CREST ON FOREHEAD.
- * STREAMERS IN TAIL.
- * AFFECTS DECIDUOUS & EVERGREEN FORESTS.
- * BLACK OVERALL.



SPANGLED & HAIRCRESTED
DRONGO

(*DICRURUS HOTTENTOTTUS*)

SIZE: MYNAs with longer tail

- * BILL LONG, POINTED & DOWNCURVED.
- * GLOSSY BLACK PLUMAGE.
- * SQUARE-CUT TAIL WITH CURLED-UP OUTER EDGES.
- * HAIR-LIKE FEATHERS ON CROWN.
- * SEASONAL MOVEMENTS GOVERNED CHIEFLY BY AVAILABILITY OF ITS STAPLE DIET OF FLOWER-NECTAR.

ENCL WITH: PITTA: Bulletin of the
Birdwatcher's Society of A.P. No. 44 AUG 1991.
SKETCHES BY: HUMAYUN TAHER.

H. J. 17/7/91



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh.

HYDERABAD

Sept 1991

No. 45

September 1991

PROGRAMME

SEPTEMBER 1991

2nd :	Executive Committee Meeting.
9th :	Indoor Meeting : Audio-Visual Presentation by Shri Pushp Kumar.
15th :	Field Trip : Golconda Tombs.
23rd :	Indoor Meeting : Film Show.
29th :	Field Trip : Narsapur Reserve Forest.

Indoor Meetings : Venue : Nazareth School, in the lane beside CHERMAS, Abids, Hyderabad. Meeting begins at 6:15 p.m..

Field Trips : Members are requested to reach the respective destinations on their own. On the 15th, we meet at the gates of the Tombs at 8:30 a.m.. On the 29th, we meet at the gate of the Inspection Bungalow, Narsapur, at 9:00 a.m..

NOTES & NEWS

* The Bombay Natural History Society has an ongoing research project studying bird migration in the Indian subcontinent. The Principal Investigator of the project is Mr. S A Hussain. In Andhra Pradesh, the project has carried out bird ringing mainly at Pulicat, Nelapattu, and Sriharikota in Nellore District. Other areas include Tirumala-Tirupati and Talakona in Chittoor District.

From August 1991, this project proposes to extend its bird ringing activities. Some tentative study areas are Lammasinghi, Sankarametta, Sileru, Godavari delta, Kolleru Lake, Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisaillam, Lankamalai, Ahobilam, Somasila, Udayagiri, Penchalakona, Horsely Hills, Mamandur-Balapalli, Kuppam, Bonamanda, and Narayanavanam-Nagalapuram among others.

These areas have been identified mainly due to previous studies that have recorded a rich avian population both in terms of species diversity and abundance. These regions are also largely undisturbed and have forest patches comprising unexplored habitat. The BNHS would be coordinating with the AP Forest Department in identifying conservation measures for these vital habitats. Much of the forests in the state are under severe human impact. Study of bird migration will help identify immensely crucial regions for total protection.

The project will be benefitted by feedback from BSAP members and other local birdwatchers and nature lovers. Readers are requested to indicate their concern at the loss of vital forest cover and help in identifying and listing areas of the Eastern Ghats as well as other parts of the state which deserve to be protected. The feedback could indicate, briefly, the species richness of birds and other fauna and flora of such areas. Information about other resource persons with knowledge about and concern for the Eastern Ghats and Andhra Pradesh

would be helpful and the feedback could include a list of such contacts. The districts that the project is initially interested in are Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, East and West Godavari, Khammam, Krishna, Nalgonda, Guntur, Prakasam, Kurnool, Nellore, Cuddapah, Anantapur, and Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh. Those providing such feedback will be mailed detailed questionnaires for a follow-up or they will be met by BNHS project personnel.

The feedback should be sent to either the editors of the PITTA or to Mr. SA Hussain, Principal Investigator, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, BOMBAY - 400 023.

* Two of our members, MS Kulkarni and Aasheesh Pittie, are studying the bird life in the Nehru Zoological Park regularly, visiting the Zoo on every Tuesday and Friday between 6am and 8am. It is impossible to do justice to the birds of this area with just two observers as they are unable to cover many areas where there is very interesting activity including courtship, nesting, etc.. Members are invited to take advantage of this opportunity to observe and record these events and thereby enhance the study by covering more areas / activities. Those interested may contact Mr. Aasheesh Pittie on the phone at 43264 during working hours.

* The Oriental Bird Club's Bulletin of July '91 has an interesting report from Pulicat Lake by Mr. Nigel Lindsay. He visited this area in Jan. '91 and recorded the following birds:
Western Reef Heron (*Egretta gularis*), a flock of 70 Common Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*), 10-12 Slender-Billed Gulls (*Larus genie*), and a Rednecked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)!
(OBC Bulletin No. 13, July '91: Recent Reports p.50)

* "Is ringing/ banding on the way out?" This is the title of an item in the July '91 issue of British Birds, which informs us that a UK company has announced the introduction of a microchip which when implanted "...through a needle under the birds skin causes no more pain than an ordinary vaccination. Once the microchip is in place, the bird will not even be aware of its existence. The system works efficiently for the duration of a bird's life ...because the chip is passive it does not require batteries and cannot break down...The tag is capable of 70 trillion unique identification code combinations ...The chip is contained in a tiny biocompatible glass capsule about the size of a grain of rice, and is programmed with a unique 10-digit code which can be identified by a hand-held tag reader. The tag reader combines portability and optimum performance in a lightweight functional design and is capable of more than 25,000 read operations on a single set of batteries."

Though the chip appears to be aimed at the cage-bird market, it could be especially useful for marking long-lived species of wild birds which tend to lose their rings, or marine birds on which ring numbers may become illegible due to contact with seawater. Used with a non-corroding, long-lasting marker, microchip tagging could even replace the traditional numbered ring/ band altogether!
(British Birds Vol.84 No.7 July '91: News and Comment p.294)

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For more information write : Siraj Taher, Honorary Secretary,
6-3-249/3, Road No.1, Banjara Hills, HYDERABAD - 500 034, INDIA.
EDITORS : Aasheesh Pittie, Pranay Waghray, Humayun Taher.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

11/7
1994

No. 46.

Wed 17/7/2001

July 1994

PROGRAMME

JULY 1994: 2nd: Executive Committee Meeting.
3rd: Field Trip: Jubilee Hills National Park.
18th: Indoor Meeting: Film show & discussion.

Indoor Meeting: Venue, office of the World Wide Fund for Nature- India, A-22, A-Block, 6-2-1, View Towers, Lakdi-ka-pul, Hyderabad -500 004 Meeting begins at 6.30 pm.

Field Trip: Members are requested to reach the destination on their own. We meet at 8.00 am., at the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute bus stand. It shall be a half-day outing.

Executive Committee Meetings will henceforth be held on the first Saturday of every month till further notice. Venue will be informed by phone to Committee Members.

NOTES & NEWS

★ In its Annual General Meeting held on 18th April 1994 at the office of the PCCF, AP Forest Dept., Saifabad, Hyderabad, members of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh elected the following Executive Committee, and subsequently the Executive Committee elected these office-bearers.

PRESIDENT:	Mr. Pushp Kumar, IFS (Retd.)	Ph: 248825
VICE-PRESIDENTS:	Mrs. G S Plumber	Ph: 232520
	Mr. N G Reddy	Ph: 238382
HON. SECRETARY:	Mr. Rajeev Mathew	Ph: 310721
HON. TREASURER:	Mr. Tim Galbraith	Ph: 232982
MEMBERS:	Mr. Aasheesh Pittie	Ph: 315683
	Mr. M S Kulkarni	Ph: 233336
	Mrs. Geeta Raghavan	Ph: 616550
	Mr. K Bharadwaj	Ph: 248343
	Mr. M K Kashinath	Ph: 36942
EX-OFFICIO:	Chief Wildlife Warden, Govt. of A.P.	

★ It was resolved at the above AGM that membership of persons on the rolls of the Society as on December 1992 would be extended up to 30th June 1994. Members are requested to send in their membership dues for 1994 to Mr. Tim Galbraith, Hon. Treasurer, Birdwatcher's Society of A.P., G.P.O. Box 159, Hyderabad-500001. Subscription rates are also given for information.

Membership Category	Admission Fee	Membership Fees (in Rupees)	
		Annual	Life
Ordinary	10.00	35.00	500.00
Student	10.00	15.00	500.00
Corporate	10.00	100.00	N.A.

★ Members of the society went on a field trip to the Nehru Zoo Park on 12th June. The curator, Mr. Banerjee, took the group around the lion safari, where it was noticed that free roaming cheetah had grazed most of the ground cover. The curator mentioned that he is trying to trap and shift the deer out of the safari area. A male tickell's flycatcher enthralled members with its soft lilting song from within a small phoenix palm grove. Outside the safari, a brown flycatcher was sighted in some casuarinas. Later we went to the bird sanctuary at Singosh Bund, which attracts waterbirds throughout the year. The idea was mooted that the society adopt this water-body and give suggestions for display material, public-usage and awareness, etc., to the zoo management. Members also volunteered to visit the sanctuary every Sunday and talk to visitors about wetlands and their importance. The curator agreed readily and promised all help.

★ At the indoor meeting on 20th June, a Survival Anglia film, 'Sunlight and Shadow', was screened to an audience of about twenty members at the WWF-India office. Members also discussed future programmes and projects, which include the compilation of an inventory of wetlands in Andhra Pradesh, for the WWF-India, who are compiling a directory of wetlands in India.

★ The editor has received a letter from Dr. S.D. Ripley's office, which is preparing a field guide to the birds of India and the surrounding countries. They require photographs of many species, forms and plumages, for a reference file from which artists can borrow pictures for their paintings. Photos will not be published, but used as reference material only. A list of birds whose pictures are required is with the Hon. Secretary. They are willing to reimburse handsomely for pictures which they purchase. For more details, please contact the Hon. Secretary.

★ Professor Sankar Chatterjee, a palaeontologist working at Texas Tech University in the USA, has discovered a new fossil 'projobird' which predates *Archaeopteryx* by at least 75 million years. The new find also gives new insight into the origins and early radiation of birds, their links to early dinosaurs and the tempo and mode of bird evolution. Previously, *Archaeopteryx lithographica*, discovered in 1863, was regarded as the oldest known bird; it has been the subject of much debate on evolutionary links with reptiles and the development of flight. Named *Protoavis texensis*, the new bird has been described from two fossil skeletons found side by side in a Texas quarry in Late Triassic deposits estimated to be 225 million years old. It was apparently a predatory protobird, about the size of a modern pheasant, with many advanced avian features placing it closer to the ancestry of today's birds than *Archaeopteryx*. The latter, indeed, seems to have been pushed into a side-branch in bird evolution - a 'living fossil' in its own lifetime, perhaps. For more of this fascinating story, read Prof. Chatterjee's paper in Series B of the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* (obtainable from The Publications Sales Department, The Royal Society, 6 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AG) [from BRITISH BIRDS. 84:10:445-446].

For more information write to : Rajeev Mathew, Hon. Sec., 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad - 500 482. INDIA. Ph: 310721.

EDITOR: Aasheesh Pittie.

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PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

23/7
1994

No. 47.

and 13/7/2001

August 1994.

PROGRAMME

AUGUST 1994: 6th: Executive Committee Meeting.
7th: Field Trip: Mahavir Harin Vanasthall.
22nd: Indoor Meeting.

Indoor Meeting: Venue, office of the World Wide Fund for Nature - India, A-22, A-Block, 6-2-1 View Towers, Lakdi-ka-pul, Hyderabad- 500004. Meeting begins at 6.30 pm.

Field Trip: Members are requested to reach the destination on their own. We meet at 8.00 a.m., at the ticketing counter in the Deer Park. Buses to Vanasthalipuram stop in front of the Deer Park.

NOTES AND NEWS

* In spite of a steady and strong drizzle, nine members participated in the Society's field trip to Jubilee Hills National Park on 3rd July. As we moved around inside the park, new members exclaimed at the existence of such lush vegetation within our city limits. The cat-and-dog weather added a rare touch of thrill and adventure. Birds were a bit scarce, but those that braved the pitter-patter were white-headed babblers, lustily singing Franklin's wren-warblers, busy tailor birds and ashy wren-warblers, quizzing ioras, flitting-fluttering spotted doves and a solemn goggle-eyed stone plover. The meows of peafowl resounded again and again and we had great views of males with long, elegant trains. Inside a horizontal crevice between two huge precariously balanced boulders, near the entrance to the park, perched four fluffed-up spotted owlets which caused some identification problems for everyone! Green bee-eaters twittered and sallied after midges which braved the mizzle. When birds were scarce our President, Mr. Pushp Kumar, held forth on the local botany and past history. He spoke of its importance as a catchment area for Banjara Hills and Jubilee Hills. Laburnums were in flower in many places, adding their luminous brilliance to the abundant verdure among the rocky landscape. Monsoonal magic had transformed the landscape into a delightful carpet of ephemeral plants which sported delicately hued flowers. A brittle stick insect did not escape the keen eye-sight of some member, and was shown around and delighted in and replaced carefully on a wavy branchlet of some bush. At the end of the trip, members did not want to leave this haven. What all of us took away was a feeling that birdwatching is after all much more than just watching birds. It is experiencing them and their environment with all the five senses! We left our footprints and took away lovely memories.

* The publications of the Society, both PITTA and MAYURA, need contributions from members. The former is a monthly bulletin which serves the purpose of an information board about Society activities and programmes. Members are requested to send interesting tit-bits of news and information about the birding world in particular and the natural

world in general, for publication. The latter is our newsletter or journal which carries articles and observations on the birdlife of Andhra Pradesh. Members' contributions are essential to make it a success. Both are supplied free of charge to members of all categories.

* On Sundays, volunteers from the Society participate in the wetland project at the zoo, where, with their assistance, visitors watch and identify birds at the Bird Sanctuary and are informed about the importance of wetlands in the environment. Those who wish to help may please contact the Hon. Secretary. A telescope has been purchased by the Society for this project, and will be used at the zoo on Sundays.

* Sightings of Darters *Anhinga rufa* have become rare all over the country. Their habitat of freshwater lakes and rivers are under tremendous stress by increasing human populations and their water requirements. This fish-eating bird with its graceful snake-like neck and rapier beak is an indicator species of our wetland areas and its decreasing sightings do not augur too well about the health of our wetlands. Members should report sightings to the Hon. Secretary with details about location, time, date and number of birds seen.

* This monsoon, plant an indigenous species of plant in your house or work place. Most of them attract birds and also require much less water than would most introduced species. For a list of such plants you may contact either the Hon. Secretary, or Editor.

* "The picids (of the bird family Picidae) are called true woodpeckers simply because they are widespread and common enough to be the birds to which the vernacular name was originally applied. But they also have the right stuff to be the nominal standard bearers. They are the premier specialists in their ecological class. Many other kinds of birds peck and pry wood to expose insects, but none do it with the élan and precision of a picid. The awl-shaped bill hits the wood at between 20 and 25 kilometers an hour, whereupon it instantaneously decelerates at 1000G, where 1G is the acceleration needed to counteract earth's gravity and 4G is what an astronaut experiences on liftoff. An ordinary brain jarred hundreds of times daily by a blow to the head of this magnitude would be reduced to pulp. The woodpecker survives because it possesses two unusual features. The brain case is made of unusually dense spongy bone joined with sets of opposing muscles that appear to act as shock absorbers. And the woodpecker brings its head up and down like a metronome in a single plane, avoiding the rotational forces that would skew the brain from side to side and tear it loose from its moorings. Jackhammer feeding is only one adaptation of the picid woodpeckers. Many of the species have a stiff wedge-shaped tail that braces them against tree trunks and bristlelike feathers over the nostrils that shield the air passages from wood dust. They employ cylindrical, sticky tongues that can be extruded beyond the tip of the bill by as much as twenty centimeters and snaked through the insect burrows to seize their prey, then retracted and coiled in a cavity encircling the inner surface of the skull." (from *The Diversity of Life* by Edward O. Wilson.)

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Rajeev Mathew, Hon. Sec., 6-3- 912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad-500 482.

Phone: 310721.

EDITOR: Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazaar, Hyderabad-500 012. Phone: 315683.



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Vol 17/4 2001

No. 48.

September 1994

PROGRAMME

September 1994 : 4th : Field trip : Sanjivayya Park.
5th : Executive committee Meeting.
19th : Indoor Meeting.

Indoor Meeting: Venue, office of the World Wide fund for Nature - India, A-22, A-Block, 6-2-1 Biew Towers, Lakdikapul, Hyderabad

Field Trip: Members are requested to reach the destination on their own. We meet at 8.00 a.m. at the main gate of the park.

EDITORIAL

Birding by ear is as enjoyable as bird-watching! I was introduced to this facet of the birder's art by some friends while at a WWF - I camp in the National Defense Academy in Pune. On most of our outings I was nonplused at the longer bird lists which my friends read at the end of the day. When I wondered aloud how I had not seen such and such a bird, I was let into this birder's secret. They had *heard* the birds which I had not seen! My endeavor since then, to lend an alert ear to avian phonetics, has paid rich dividends.

The art is to follow any bird call, or for that matter any intriguing sound in the wilderness, to its source. This is the surest way of identifying it. I remember how some of us spent half an hour, heads craned upwards, under a huge tree in Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, perplexed by a loud, ringing call, repeated again and again, till someone spied the Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* - the "one more bottle" bird in the foliage!

Bird song is a source of delight and information. It is a fairly accurate indicator of the whereabouts and circumstances of the caller. With care and patience one can distinguish between the alarm call of an Ashy Wren-warbler *Prinia socialis* and its' song. As one becomes proficient in this art, the pleasure of bird song is felt deeply when the distance is nothing but a spread of Babool *Acacia arabica* and Prosopis on a hot afternoon and the raucous call of Large Grey Babblers *Turdoides malcolmi* is wafted towards you on a tendril of breeze. I have delighted in the morning chorus of various places and maintained lists of bird calls as they occurred, one by one with approaching daylight. Many a time, fellow birders slept through it all! It becomes second nature to identify the caller in the mind, while within the house, at any time of day. Lesser Whistling Teals *Dendrocygna javanica* used to fly every evening at 7 p.m. over my house in Begum Bazaar, perhaps from Miralam Tank to Hussain Sagar. And if their characteristic whistles, uttered on the wing, reached my ears, my heart leapt out the confines of the room I sat in and thrilled in the flock of birds winging their way to roost through the gathering dark, whistling as they went. Begin birding by ear today. Birding will never be the same again.

NOTES AND NEWS

- ☆ THIS IS THE LAST REMINDER FOR RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP FOR THE YEAR 1994-1995. THOSE WHO DO NOT RENEW THEIR MEMBERSHIP BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER 1994 WILL NOT BE SENT THE PUBLICATIONS (PITTA AND MAYURA) OF THE BSAP.
- * Members can collect their membership cards from the Hon. Secretary. Separate cards have been printed for annual members and life members.
- * Our member, Mr. Kishore Rao, wrote a popular article on the activities of the BSAP in the local newspaper, DECCAN CHRONICLE, on 20-7-1994. This was excellent publicity for the society and resulted in a number of

nature enthusiasts contacting the Hon. Secretary to make enquiries about the Society. Most of them eventually became members!

- * "The Ministry of Environment and Forests of the Centre has initiated a Rs 8 lakh project for the study of the impact of the effluents discharged from aquaculture ponds, said Dr. A. Abdul Rahman, Project Coordinator, and head of the dept. of Zoology of Pushpam College, Poondi. During the three-year project, a detailed study of the shrimp farms from Nellore in Andhra Pradesh coast, up to the Kanyakumari coast in Tamil Nadu would be made by research scholars. The project would prepare an environment management plan for the coastal region in the light of the practice of aquaculture. " (The Hindu, 27.7.94)
- * Participants in the Zoo Project of the BSAP were thrilled by the sighting of an Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* near the Singosh Talab on 24-7-1994. Also of interest were four pairs of Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* nesting in the water! One pair was busy with two precocious two-day-olds and the danger of rising water level, from the recent rains. They were constantly adding material to their nest to perhaps prevent inundation !
- * A new bird sanctuary has come up at Sur-Sarovar, 20 km. from Agra on the Agra-Delhi road. Spread over 403 hectares, it is home to a large number of local and migratory birds. This area was earmarked in 1991 with a three-point programme-namely habitat management, tourism and interpretation and infrastructure development (The Hindu 17.8.94).
- * We welcome the Society for Applied Ornithology (India), into the fold of societies working for the cause of birds in India. Formed in 1993, its primary objective is to provide a forum for exchange of information and experiences related to the recent advances in the field of applied ornithology among members and related persons/organizations / institutions devoted to the study of ornithology in India and abroad. This Society proposes to hold a National Symposium on BIRDS IN AGRICULTURAL - ECOSYSTEM at A.P. Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500030, from 22-24 December, 1994. There are various topics for the Symposium under the following heads: Crop losses, Management, Ecology and behaviour of birds and Environment and conservation. For more information about the Society and the Symposium contact Dr. P. Syamsunder Rao, Secretary, Society for Applied Ornithology (India), Insectory Buildings, Veterinary College Campus, A.P. Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500 030.
- * The first announcement has arrived of another seminar on ECO- DEVELOPMENT, HABITAT AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN RAJASTHAN AND ADJOINING AREAS, to be held between 21-23 October, 1994 at Kota, Rajasthan. Details may be had from the Hon. Secretary.
- * The Vanasthali trip on 7.8.94 was a grand success with 28 members participating in the nature walk through the deer park. Herds of frisky Blackbuck *Antelope cervicapra* and stately Cheetal Axis axis enthralled members. It was noted that with the increase in number of these ungulates the ground cover of grass, etc., is almost completely grazed, but lots of Flame of the Forest *Butea frondosa* trees are coming up all over the park. A Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* was seen two to three times, soaring overhead, amidst much smaller Pariah Kites *Milvus migrans*. Someone spotted a Small Greenbilled Malkoha *Rhopodytes viridirostris* flit across the path and disappear into a tree. A number of butterflies and moths were identified by Dr. S. Tej Kumar, who also helped identify many types of caterpillars spotted by members. The cryptic colors and behaviour of these tiny creatures fascinated everybody. In one place was a moth mimicking the cracked bark of a tree to perfection and in another a caterpillar was stretched out like a slender twig between two branchlets of a Neem *Azadirachta indica*. There was one miming a minuscule predator with the wrong end resembling a head, uplifted in deception, its abdomen painted with large yellow and blue 'eyes' to frighten away adversaries. The day closed with a film on Project Tiger, screened in the mini-auditorium of the Environmental Education Centre in the park. We appreciate the assistance of the A.P. Forest Department and place on record our gratitude.
- * In a rain-blessed ceremony, the Chief Minister of A.P. renamed the Jubilee Hills National Park as Brahmananda Reddy National Park. The A.P. Forest Dept., also started its Vanamahotsav celebrations at this function with tree planting by dignitaries and children, prize distribution to school children for painting, debate, etc., and for the first time in the state, by nature education through Eco-Camps. About thirty students of various schools in the city, participated in the two day camp, staying overnight in tents, going around on nature trails and understanding the basics of ecology. Members of the BSAP took them around on a birdwatching trail one morning and later our President spoke to them about the role of birds in the environment. We learn that such eco-camps are going to be a regular activity throughout the state.

For more information write to :

Rajeev Mathew, Hon. Sec., B.S.A.P., 6-3-912/1, Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad - 500 482, Phone : 310721,
Editor : Aasheesh Pittie

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Society Regd. No. 1158/83, Hyderabad.

No. 49.

October 1994.

PROGRAMME

October 1994 : 2nd: Field Trip : Chilkur Deer Park, We meet at the main gate of the Park.
This is a half-day outing.

3rd: Executive Committee Meeting.

17th: Indoor Meeting : Talk with demonstration of live specimens by Friends of Snakes Club.

23rd: Field Trip: Anantgiri Reserve Forest. We meet at the A.P. Forest Department rest house, at Anantgiri. This will be a full day outing and members are requested to carry water and picnic lunches.

Indoor Meeting: Venue, office of the World Wide Fund for Nature India, A-22, A-Block, 6-2-1 View Towers, Lakdi-ka-pul, Hyderabad - 500 004. Meeting begins at 6.30 p.m.

Field Trip: Members are requested to reach the destinations on their own by 8.00 a.m. For detailed directions contact Mr. Rajeev Mathew, Hon. Secretary.

NOTES & NEWS

* Mr. Ranjit Manakadan informs us that he has seen a Whitefronted Goose *Anser albifrons* (on 31.10.1992) and an Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* at Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary. The former was with a flock of Barheaded Geese, feeding "on the left-overs of the groundnut harvest" and the latter "...a regular visitor each year.... was feeding on a hare, a few days ago." Both these records are new for the state of Andhra Pradesh! A note written by Mr. Manakadan, on the above sightings, has been accepted for publication by the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.

* The Whitewinged Wood Duck *Cairina scutulata* was common in parts of northeastern India until the beginning of this century. However, now it is critically endangered. Only 210 individuals of this beautiful duck are known to survive in the wild, mostly in Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh and India. Two recent surveys conducted between February and May 1993 by H.S.A. Yahya of the Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University in parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh resulted in 26 sightings of this species in 40 days of intensive search. Birds were also heard (but not seen) eight times. Yahya estimates a total of 100 birds for both states, higher than the 1992 estimate of 60 by A.J. Green of the IWRB. This bird inhabits pools and marshes in evergreen forests. Depletion and fragmentation of habitat, and poaching of eggs and ducklings are the main reasons for the reduction in the wood duck population, Yahya feels. The scarcity of nesting tree sites is probably a limiting factor for this species where other human disturbances are minimal. (Contributed by Suhel Quader from: A survey of the whitewinged wood duck, *Cairina scutulata*, in India. By H.S.A. Yahya. IWRB Threatened Waterfowl Research Group Newsletter No. 5, March 1994. * Source: Status of whitewinged wood duck in Thailand; by John Parr. Asian Wetland News Vol. 6 No. 2, December 1993.)

* "When forests are leveled, the elements that composed the wood and tissue are partially converted into greenhouse gases. Then when forests are regrown, an equivalent amount of the elements are recalled into solid matter. The net loss of tropical forest cover world-wide during 1850-1980 contributed between 90 and 120 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide to the earth's atmosphere, not far below the 165 billion metric tons emanating from the burning of coal, oil, and gas. These two processes together have raised the concentration of carbon dioxide in the global atmosphere by more than 25 percent, setting the stage for global warming and a rise in sea level. The second most important greenhouse gas, methane, has doubled at about the same time; and 10 to 15 percent of the increase is thought to be due to deforestation. If 4 million square kilometers of the tropical regions were replanted in forest, in other words an area half the size of Brazil, all of the current buildup of atmospheric carbon dioxide from human agents would be canceled. In addition, the rise in methane and other greenhouse gases would be slowed." (E.O. Wilson in 'The Diversity of Life'. Penguin Books.).

* The Black Drongo or king crow *Dicrurus adsimilis* is a insectivorous bird. It devours insects such as leaf folders, caseworms, leaf caterpillars, Prodenia, Heliothis, sphinx caterpillars, earhead bugs, weevils, stink bugs, semilooper caterpillars and chaffer beetle grubs. The birds follow the plough and other tractor drawn implements and pick up insects disturbed by ploughing like noctuid pupae, cutworms, grasshoppers, wireworms, and beetles. Plants such as rice, cotton, groundnut, vegetables, gingelly, sunflower, castor are benefited by the drongo. Observations at Bhavanisagar indicated that these birds are potential pest control agents in rice and groundnut. Larvae of leaf folders and caseworms are devoured in large numbers. Earhead bug incidence of Prodenia and Heliothis in LBP tract also witnessed the usefulness of these birds. They seldom feed on plants. They must be protected for effective integrated pest management. (S. Thirumurthi & V. Gunasekaran of Forest College & Research Institute, Mettupalayam, in THE HINDU of 17.8.1994).

* The following list of butterflies seen during the Society's trip to Mahavir Harin Vanasthali on 7.8.1994, has been compiled by Dr. S. Tej Kumar.

Lime butterfly *Papilio demoleus*, Indian Cabbage White *Artogeia canidia*, Common Mormon *Papilio polytes*, Common Rose *Pachliopta aristolochiae*, Crimson Rose *Pachliopta hector*, Danaid Eggfly *Hypolimnys missippus*, Common Jezebel *Delias eucharis*, Common Sailor *Neptis hylas*, Peacock Pansy *Precis almana*, Blue Pansy *Precis orithya*, Mottled Emigrant *Catopsilia pyranthe*, Small Salmon Arab *Colitis amata*, Glassy Tiger *Parantica aplea*, *Lycaenids* - 3 sps., Crimson Tip *Colotis danae*, Common Crow *Eupolea core*. The Grass Yellow *Eurema hecaba*, was conspicuous by its absence. Other insects seen were jewel beetles, Sphingid caterpillar and an interesting specimen of spider eating a wasp in its web!

* If your office recycled 1 ton of the paper it uses, you'd be saving 17 trees and keeping 60 pounds of air pollution out of the sky.

* The discovery of a new species has initiated a debate among ornithologists over the importance of collecting specimens to document the event. The bird, a member of the shrike family that was christened the boubou, was found by researchers who were working in Somalia. After capturing the individual the ornithologists took a blood sample and a few feathers, and made a videotape and recording of the voice, and turned it loose. This may be the first case in which ornithologists have named a new species without a specimen, and many members of the fraternity have been critical of the decision. They argue that additional information can be gleaned from specimens, that critical comparison with other species is not possible now that the bird has been released, and that the future of the species is not dependent on a single individual. Less and less collecting has been done, or condoned, in recent years, and it seems likely that this will not be the last time a new species is named without a specimen. It is certainly not the end of what will be a long and passionate debate. (Blom, Eirik (1992): Quick Takes. BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST, 15:1:120-126.)

For more information write to:

Rajeev Mathew, Hon. Sec., B.S.A.P., 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane,

Somajiguda, Hyderabad - 500 482. Phone: 310721.

Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, Ph: 591991/315683. FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY



P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

Society Regd. No. 1158/83, Hyderabad.

Ind 17/2/2001

No. 50

June 1995

PROGRAMME

INDOOR MEETING : 5th June 1995 : Audio-visual programme on the songs of the birds of South India.

FIELD TRIP : 28th May 1995: Jubilee Hills National Park. Meeting venue - entrance on the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute side. Time - 7.00 a.m.

18th June 1995: Nehru Zoological Park. Venue - Meeting venue - ticket counter. Time - 8.00 a.m.

Indoor Meeting : Venue, office of the World Wide Fund for Nature - India, A-22, A-Block, 6-2-1, View Towers, Lakdi-ka-pul, Hyderabad - 500 004. Meeting begins at 6.30 p.m.

Field Trips : Members are requested to reach the destinations on their own. For detailed directions contact Mr. Aasheesh Pittie (315683) or Mr. M.S. Kulkarni (233336).

EDITORIAL

End of the day birding, or birding at dusk, has a quality of quietude which is absent in the hustle and bustle of early morning birdwatching. It has a unique serendipity. Activity is reduced, and things happen with the stateliness of a day's energy gradually subsiding. I have found peace in the quiet ditty of a male Pied Bushchat, as he sits himself upon some subtly prominent place and practices his muted melody, jerkily, almost nonchalantly, flicking his tail, up and down. As it darkens, he swoops to his roost and calls it a day. The Shikra, who has invariably hunted and fed just before dusk - having espied an unwary squirrel baby or garden lizard from an elevated perch, manoeuvred through trees, leaving a wake of anxious screamings of 'ware - hawk' from flustered lesser passerines, pounced upon and waited for life to ebb away and then flown to a favourite feeding post and satiated herself - has also found a resting place in the recesses of a leafy peepal. A sisterhood of Whiteheaded Babblers arrive by a devious, circuitous route, traversing up the spindly stems of a Henna hedge, switching this-way-and-that through the leaf-shadowed depths of a small mango tree, float into their roosting Flame of the Forest on an invisible thread of contact calls, one by one. Arrived, they huddle upto each other, some facing this way, some the other, and settle for the night. A Goldenbacked Woodpecker sends his peal of manic laughter ricocheting through the warming, coppery, tinder dry garden. A Coucal booms its retirement for the day and a Drongo traipses behind crepuscular midges. From the three floor apartment in the dead Fish-tail Palm, come the first chuckles and coughs of aroused Spotted Owlets.

NOTES & NEWS

1. Crane behavior: Working with cranes, at a rehabilitation center for cranes, a craniac has observed the following behavior of cranes.
 - * "A crane walks stiffly, with extended toes. Although this behavior indicates displeasure, no confrontation is imminent.
 - * "A pair of cranes calls in unison (a courtship and breeding display) and picks at the grass and ground. The birds are asserting a stronger degree of territorial displeasure.

- * "A crane fluffs up, lowers one wing, growls, inserts its bill between body and dangling wing, and unblinkingly stares me down. Known as the dropped-wing threat display, this is a serious warning of impending territorial defense.
 - * "A crane approaches and at about ten feet away drops to the ground in what appears to be an incubation posture. Look out! This stance is the launching pad for a missilelike strike at the face, and the crane wields a spearlike bill and lacerating claws.
 - * "Cranes show their pair bond by unison behavior - walking and feeding together and calling in synchrony. The stronger the cranes' pair bond, the more synchronous and similar the behaviors.
 - * "Like us, male cranes of most species have deeper voices than females.
 - * "Although crane pairs are the model of equality, male cranes usually perform more of the territorial defense duties, while females tend more to the young.
 - * "Cranes can pick out a single significant person in any crowd or context, for their eyesight and alertness are keen. In captivity or in the wild, the cranes alertly watch for and distinguish between those who intrude and those who toe invisible territorial lines.
 - * "Most zoos have at least a few cranes. The next time you visit a zoo, spend some time observing crane behavior." (Ann Swengel (1994): Crane Behavior. BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST. 16:6:50-55).
2. "The colors of feathers are determined in two ways : through pigments and through microscopic feather structure. There are primarily two pigments in the feathers of our birds: melanins and carotenoids. Melanins are responsible for all blacks, browns, reddish browns, and some yellows. All other colors, such as blue and green, are produced with microscopic feather structure that refracts the light as it hits the feather. Thus on a male eastern or western bluebird, the reddish brown breast is a result of pigment, and the blue is a result of feather structure. The feather color of some bird groups seems to be determined in only one way, while others call upon both pigment and feather structure. Sparrows and shorebirds derive color largely from melanins; orioles from melanins and carotenoids; others, like the warblers, from melanins, carotenoids, and feather structure." (Donald & Lillian Stokes (1994): Birds and Color. BIRDWATCHER'S DIGEST. 17(2): 114-121).

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 1995?

Please send your cash / cheques / demand drafts favouring 'Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh' to Mr. Rajeev Mathew, the Hon. Secretary at the address given below.

For Private Circulation Only

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P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh HYDERABAD

July 1995.

No. 51.

PROGRAMME

INDOOR MEETING: 10 July 1995: Discussion and registration for Society's nature camp to Rollapadu.

Venue: office of the World Wide Fund for Nature - India, A-22, A-Block, 6-2-1, View Towers, Lakdi-ka-pul, Hyderabad 500004. Meeting begins at 6.30 p.m.

FIELD TRIP: 2 July 1995: Chilkur Deer Park. Meeting venue - entrance of the Deer Park. Time - 7.30 a.m.

22-23 July 1995: Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary - details will be announced in the indoor meeting of the Society on 10 July.

Note:- Members are requested to reach the destinations on their own. For detailed directions contact Mr. Rajeev Mathew (310721) or Mr. M.S. Kulkarni (233336).

EDITORIAL

"The Spotbilled Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* is one of the endangered bird species which has suffered a rapid decline in its population in the last 70 years. From over a million pelicans around 1920s, the world population of this species has crashed to an estimated population of less than 10,000 birds in the wild today. Once distributed all over South and South-east Asia, the bulk of its population is now found only in India and Sri Lanka. In India, the species breeds in about 10 sites distributed over Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Over the last 100 years, about seven nesting sites have been lost in India. The pelicans did not breed at one of the sites in Assam this year. For the future survival of this species, continued nesting of the birds at these breeding sites is crucial.

"In Karnataka, pelicans breed only at Kokkare Bellur in Mandya district, located about 80 km. from Bangalore. Though published records indicate that this pelicanry was in existence in 1864, the colony may well be nearly 500 years old. At this site, pelicans along with Painted Storks nest on trees found amidst houses in the village. Over the years, this pelicanry has also experienced a dramatic decrease in numbers of pelicans. From a population of well over 2,000 breeding birds about 30 years back, the numbers have dwindled to a mere 330 birds today. Two of the main factors contributing to this alarming population decline have been the loss of preferred trees used for nesting by the birds and loss of nestlings which for certain reasons, fall down from their nests. Such nestlings which are unable to fly and fend for themselves, either die out of starvation or fall prey to dogs in the village. Already about 40 nestlings have died at Bellur this year." (Save The Spotbilled Pelican - contribute to the Pelican Fund).

Well, someone has finally decided to put a stop to this. A group of birdwatcher volunteers with the help of the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD), have built a nursery in Kokkare Bellur on 250 sq.m. of village land and have begun feeding the fallen chicks of both the pelican and the painted stork. Though the KFD has arranged to supply fish for the chicks, funds were raised by the group, as pelican chicks gulp down almost a kilo of fish per day! A jubilant letter from one of the volunteers, Dr. S. Subramanya reads "Our pelican project is going on smoothly. We have raised 23 nestlings so far and 19 of them have successfully joined the wild pelicans in the village. We even 'teach' these fallen nestlings how to fish before they fly off! We have dug a fish pond where the young practice and learn to fish. Our feeding program even attracts wild pelicans during feeding time!" It is indeed laudable that none of the chicks have got 'imprinted' with its foster parents and are returning to the wild pelican flock. *This is active grassroots conservation.*

NOTES & NEWS

1. The Ornithological Society of India (OSI) is organizing its bi-annual conference in Delhi from 14-16 November 1995, whose theme will be "Environment and Birds". Topics shall address a) how the environment influences various aspects of birdlife, b) how the birds influence their environment and c) what can be done to promote interest in and protect birdlife and to maximize avian contribution to our lives. Presentations will constitute invited state-of-art lectures on selected topics followed by short communications in the form of oral and poster presentations and round tables. For more details please contact Dr. Asha Chandola-Saklani, Secretary-General OSI, OSI Secretariat, Box 45, Srinagar, Garhwal, UP-246174.

2. The joy of birding increases tremendously when binoculars are used to watch birds. The BSAP has received a gift of 3 binoculars and 1 telescope from The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, England. These are being used by the members during our field trips, with great satisfaction. We record our deepest appreciation of all those responsible and involved in making this possible.

3. Details regarding and contributions to Save The Pelican Fund may be had from / sent to,

- * Dr. S. Subramanya, # 231 Chitramala Apartments, Byrasandra, Bangalore 560011.
- * Mysore Amateur Naturalists, # 571, 9th Cross, Aniketana Road, Kuvempunagar, Mysore 570023.
- * Merlin Nature Club, # 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560078.

4. Members were enthralled by the AVP on songs of the birds of South India during the Society's indoor meeting on 5th June. The importance of bird calls as devices of field identification was appreciated by the members who were able to identify many a troublesome skulker, from frustrating days in the field - whether close at home or far afield - in the pitch darkness of the meeting hall which was erupting with joyous bird calls and shrieks of delight as another one was identified. On at least one occasion the watch man came running up the stairs and then turned away sheepishly! The culprits were a pair of lustily calling Mottled Wood Owls! Most members turned around incredulously when the Malabar Whistling Thrush wandered through its captivating whistle. It is hard to believe that such a sound can be made by a bird! Mr. P. Sivaprasad, who has done the recording has to be commended and congratulated for his pioneering work. The audio-cassette may be purchased from this address. P.S. Sivaprasad, 51 Ansari Street, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009.

5. Among the 45 odd species of birds which members of the Society observed during their field trip to Nehru Zoo Park (18 June), they had good sightings of the Pied Crested Cuckoo, Small Minivet, Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike and Chestnut Bittern!

MEMBERSHIP FOR 1995 IS DUE FOR RENEWAL.

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For more information write to:

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IPITTA

No. 52-54.

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

Aug-Oct 1995.

PROGRAMME

INDOOR MEETING: 16 October 1995: Film show and discussion on proposed Workshop.

Venue: 8-2-545 Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034. Meeting begins at 6.30 p.m.

FIELD TRIP: 29 October 1995: Shamirpet Deer Park. Meeting venue - entrance of the A.P. Tourism complex, Shamirpet Lake Resort. Time - 8 a.m. (earlier is better!)

Note:- Members are requested to reach the destinations on their own. For detailed directions of both programmes contact Mr. Rajiv Mathew (310721), Mr. M.S. Kulkarni (233336) or Mr. Aasheesh Pittie (315683).

EDITORIAL

Since the world got wired, birds have found a new perch. Watching birds on a wire is a fascinating pastime. I have stopped innumerable times on the new fly-over connecting the Raj Bhavan area to Secretariat, to admire the neat rows of migrant swallows strung like musical notes across a calm blue page of sky. The birds spaced-out at 'wing' length, preening or generally acting social. When something disturbs them or in play, with an explosion of exuberant chitterings they slip-slide away. One very wet and rainy day a couple of friends and I followed the lustful, feverish yells of a brain-fever bird in the forests of Narsapur, until we found the fellow high above the trees, lit upon a wire, singing his heart out! The wire is a perch to an untold variety of birds and it is one of my favourite watch-posts for a bird on a wire is completely visible there and that much more easier to identify. Not that I haven't been stumped by a bird on a wire and turned away, blinded by my ignorance. Why can't warblers just play hide-and-seek with leaves?

The wire is a 'crow's nest' for the avian sentry. A wire is *the* cool place to promenade plumes and air arias, to flirt and to fight and fly off. The wire is the ideal change of perspective for pouncing upon those scrumptious little critters which scrounge within the angled folds and hinges of grass leaves or thrum up with the turning sod. It is the launch pad for avian artists to trapeze across the azure top's arched dome, snapping up midges in mid-flight with poise and panacea. The wire is a clothesline for nature's wardrobe where the fabric is a multi-hued feather.

Have you heard of the wire-perching-bird life-list? No? Then why don't you start one? Which birds use the wire, for what, at what times, seasons? Get wired to wire-fancying birds. Soon enough you'll have enough material to drop me a line!

NOTES & NEWS

"Do you have talking parrots?"

"No, madam, Not at the moment. But how about a woodpecker?"

"Well, does it talk?"

"No, not exactly. But it knows the Morse Code."

(Der Spatz bat ne Meise, éd. Wolf Schenk. Contributed by Dr. Kumar Ghorpade).

The Bombay Natural History Society is celebrating Dr. Salim Ali's (1896-1987) centenary year with a Seminar, among other events, on Conservation of Avifauna of Wetlands and Grasslands, from February 12-15, 1996 at Bombay. The Registration Fee is a reasonable Rs. 300 and limited accommodation is being arranged by the Society on a first cum first served basis. However

accommodation in the city is available from Rs. 600 (single) to Rs. 9000 (5 star double). A pamphlet from the Society states "This International Seminar aims to bring together experts and planners from the world over to identify and recommend options for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and grasslands to ensure the future of this valuable natural resource. The seminar will provide an opportunity to discuss and examine the work done by both international and local agencies in this context. One of the major outputs of this Seminar is expected to be the development of an international network for the conservation of such habitats by exploiting the possibilities of initiating projects and programmes and to provide a sound basis for future international co-operation. It is intended to publish a special volume of the BNHS Journal on this theme, which would include the presentations at the seminar and additional contributions." Participation is strongly recommended and interested members of the BSAP should contact The Organizing Secretary, Salim Ali Centenary Seminar, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Dr. Salim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Marg, Bombay 400023.

The Asian Waterfowl Census conducted by the members of the BSAP and other birders of the state early this year was quite a success. A gist of the data is given below. 30 participants (whose forms reached the coordinator) counted a total of 91,463 waterfowl at 49 sites in 12 districts of the state of Andhra Pradesh.

BIRD GROUPS	NUMBERS
Grebes	1,765
Pelicans	1,152
Cormorants & Darters	1,561
Herons & Egrets	14,439
Storks	1,885
Ibises & Spoonbills	706
Flamingos	6,724
Geese & Ducks	44,650
Cranes	0
Rails, Gallinules, Coots	4,639
Finfoots & Jacanas	372
Shorebirds	12,852
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers	718

Mr. M.S. Kulkarni reports that 18 members birded in Chilkur Deer Park (2.7.95), on the Vi-

karabad road, spotting around 40 species of birds. Both Purple and Purplerumped Sunbirds were seen in good numbers, especially carrying food for nestlings! Two pairs of Yellow-eyed Babblers were also seen carrying nesting material. And every one was thrilled when they saw a Monitor Lizard! In comparison, the outing to the Hyderabad University Campus (5.8.95) was meager on attendance (8 birders). 35 species of birds were listed and Whitethroated Munias were seen in various stages of nesting activity. An active flock of Cotton Teals enthralled the members.

The World Pheasant Association, the specialist group for the conservation of Galliformes worldwide, are setting up a database of these birds. A letter from their Indian chapter states "*With the increase in the inflow of galliform related information, the World Pheasant Association is formalizing its data storage and retrieval capabilities. The information regarding galliform records is now maintained in a database which will need to be updated constantly. You can also contribute towards building up of this information system by sending in whatever galliform related information you possess on the attached form. Kindly take care to fill in one form for one species and one record.*" Forms can be had from the Hon. Sec. or the Editor.

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 1995? IT IS DUE FOR RENEWAL.

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Editor: Aasheesh Pittie, 8-2-545 Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034. Ph: 3320269.

PITTA

No. 55.

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

Nov 1995.

cut 17/2/2001

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTINGS

12 November : Palmakole Tank, National Highway No. 7, Palmakole Village, Mahbubnagar Dist., Time - 8 a.m. at village bus stand. This is a half day outing. Frequent buses from Charminar Bus Stand to Palmakole or Jehangir-Pir-Dargah via Palmakole.

26 November : Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak District. Hourly buses, starting at 0530 hrs., to Medak via Narsapur, leave from Imliban Bus Stand and Jubilee Bus Stand, Secunderabad. This will be a full day trip and members should carry light snacks and drinking water.

Note:- Members are requested to reach the destinations on their own. For detailed directions contact Mr. Rajiv Mathew (310721), Mr. M.S. Kulkarni (233336) or Mr. Aasheesh Pittie (315683).

EDITORIAL

Few aspects of bird study interest as many people as migration. One of the most exciting times for bird-watchers are the occasions when the migrants arrive or a 'vagrant' is discovered, probably off its' normal route. Besides the excitement of migration, noting arrival and departure dates or recording some rare species, there is the greater fascination of discovering how birds return year after year to the same location or how they navigate over such long distances!

To fully appreciate a migration season, keep a record of all the birds you see every time you go birdwatching. Note the number of individual species and if possible their sex and age. Soon a pattern of arrival and departures will develop. Some may be passing through your area quickly while others may remain for several weeks or months before departing to nest in some distant country. Consider the habitat requirements of individual species and how they utilize the food available. There may be certain locations at a lake, a forest or scrubland that may be more attractive for certain birds and other areas which are totally ignored. Also the effects of weather changes if any! As the years pass, you will be able to compare your record from year to year, noting the changes in the dates, population or number of species and from this will develop a proper understanding of the pattern of migration.

NOTES & NEWS

BIRD WATCH

Went one morning for a nature walk
To have a nice time and small talk.
But boy was I in for a big surprise?
For not less than thirty birds did I spy.
A Spotted Dove soon flew from its nest
Black and white dots and brownish chest.

Split-tailed Black Drongo had a glossy belly
I thought I had already seen it in Delhi.
The Brain Fever bird had a very cute name
But the Babblers grey and white sounded the same.

Large Pied Wagtail with a grey chest
While wagging its tail was looking the best.

Some of the Egrets were having a battle
While they were sitting on the cattle.
Saw a Koel, Swift, Pigeon and Crow
Hungry by now we were ready to go.

-0-

Ritika Sabharwal (10 years)

Ritika was part of a children's group who under took a birdwatching -nature-walk on 1-10-1995 in the Cantonment area under the joint auspices of the BSAP and College of Defense Management Environmentalist's Club.

A Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike was the first to greet the 4 birders at the gates of the Shamirpet Deer Park on the morning of 27/10, which was also heralded by a Koel. Before other members could join them, also seen were the Spotted Munia, some Pond Herons at the several water puddles, Little Brown Doves on overhead electric wires and Redvented Bulbuls in the bushes. When other members arrived, the group moved towards the lake where the water level looked good owing to the unprecedented rains the previous fortnight. A bird of prey flying overhead was identified as the Hen Harrier and, a bird on a distant rock, as the Blue Rock Thrush. A juvenile Shikra was seen sunning on a midstream rock. Overhead flew some Wiretailed Swallows, House Swifts and Dusky Crag Martins. On the waterbody could be seen Cattle Egrets, Little Cormorant, Grey Herons, Little Egrets, Green, Common and Spotted Sandpipers and on a high rock nearby there existed the nest of a Scavenger Vulture. This nest is being observed for the last 12-15 years. Back at the deer park the birds sighted were the Grey, White and Large Pied Wagtails, Black Redstart, Franklin's Wren-Warbler, Ashy Wren-Warbler, Purple and Purplerumped Sunbirds, Indian Robin and a Redwattled Lapwing flying overhead. The vegetation at the park has grown very nicely with several low areas filled with water due to the rains. While exchanging notes at the end of the trip, some of the other birds sighted, which were reported by the members, were Rufousbacked and Baybacked Shrike, Whitethroated Munia, Ashycrowned and Syke's Crested Lark, Redrumped Swallows, Small Green Bee-eaters, Small Blue and Pied Kingfishers, House and Jungle Crows, Pariah Kite and Black Drongo. Thus ended this trip to an interesting birding spot.

The Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* (GIB) is one of the rarest birds both in India and the world. In the 1980s during their study in Rajasthan, Dr. Asad Rahmani and other members of the Bombay Natural History Society team, estimated the population of these birds in that state to be around 800, mainly in the Thar Desert area. These areas now form part of the Desert National Park. Owing to the vastness of the areas, a complete survey could not be done hence the GIB population could possibly be much more than the 800 birds estimated. Again in 1993-94, when Rahmani undertook 4 surveys, the number of birds had shown a considerable decline to almost half of the 1980s figure. Except for the Desert National Park, where there is protection, therefore comparatively better figures, the decline in number of birds and also destruction of its habitat was drastic. Even hunting / poaching are reported from certain areas. The reasons according to Rahmani, could be several - destruction of the grassland habitat with few opportunities for breeding; expansion of agriculture; colonization; development of towns, and extensive plantation of exotic species. The Indira Gandhi Canal also seems to have contributed a great deal to the destruction of habitat and a decline in the numbers of GIBs. Besides the general disturbances, each area has its own specific problems and these need to be attended if the GIB is to survive and increase in numbers. Being a long living and slow breeding bird, it needs to live and breed in an area for 10-15 years so that its progeny also find these areas conducive to breeding.

(Rahmani, A R (1994): Status and Conservation of the Great Indian Bustard in the Thar Desert. NLBW. 35(4): 64-65.)

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PITTA

No. 57-61.

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

Jan-May 1996.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTINGS

12th May : Nehru Zoological Park. Time - 7.30 a.m. at ticket counter. This will be a half day trip. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own.

EDITORIAL

Endemic species are those restricted to a defined geographical area. Of nearly 115 species of endemic birds listed for the Indian subcontinent, 54 species are found in Andhra Pradesh, of which 40 species are endemic to the subcontinent and the rest (14 species) are endemic to India. One bird, Jerdon's Courser, is unique to Andhra Pradesh alone ! Below is a tentative list of endemic birds found in Andhra Pradesh, compiled by Mr. Krys Kazmierczak (pers. comm.), who is deeply interested in Indian birds and is currently working on a book dealing with Birdwatching Areas of India. In the table below, * = probably extinct, ? = status and/or abundance uncertain, E = endemic to the Indian subcontinent, I = endemic to India, T = threatened, t = near threatened. Names of birds are preceded by their reference numbers from the Handbook.

ENDEMIC BIRDS OF INDIAN SUBCONTINENT REPORTED FROM ANDHRA PRADESH

106	Pinkheaded Duck	15	* T	877	Redwinged Bushlark	E
241	Painted Partridge		E	878	Ashycrowned Finch-Lark	E
255	Jungle Bush Quail		E	882	Rufoustailed Finch-Lark	E
260	Rock Bush Quail	1	I	901	Malabar Crested Lark	8 I
262	Painted Bush Quail	2	I	902	Sykes's Crested Lark	9 I
275	Red Spurfowl		E	967	Whitebellied Drongo	E
278	Painted Spurfowl	3	I	1135	Yellowthroated Bulbul	10 t I
301	Grey Junglefowl	4	t I	1138	Whitebrowed Bulbul	E
311	Indian Peafowl		E	1222	Rufousbellied Babbler	E
354	Great Indian Bustard	16	T E	1258	Large Grey Babbler	11 I
357	Lesser Florican	17	T E	1265	Jungle Babbler	E
440	Indian Courser		E	1267	Whiteheaded Babbler	E
441	Jerdon's Courser	5	T I	1413	Kashmir Redbreasted Flycatcher	19 T E
370	Yellow-wattled Lapwing		E	1506	Rufousfronted Wren-Warbler	E
584	Plaintive Cuckoo		E	1517	Ashy Wren-Warbler	E
595	Small Greenbilled Malkoha		E	1521	Jungle Wren-Warbler	E
598	Sirkeer Cuckoo		E	1546	Broadtailed Grass Warbler	12 t I
627	Rock Eagle Owl		E ?	1547	Bristled Grass Warbler	20 T E
657	Mottled Wood Owl	6	I	1731	Pied Ground Thrush	21 t E ?
676	Jerdon's Nightjar		E	1748	Tickell's Thrush	E
710	Malabar Trogon		E	1798	Whitewinged Black Tit	13 T I
767	Grey Hornbill		E	1891	Large Pied Wagtail	E
775	Malabar Pied Hornbill	18	t E	1911	Loten's Sunbird	E
782	Large Green Barbet		E	1961	Blackthroated Weaver	E
785	Small Green Barbet	7	I	1965	Green Munia	14 T I
858	Blackbacked Woodpecker		E	1966	Whitethroated Munia	E
867	Indian Pitta		E	1971	Rufousbellied Munia	E

The following three memorable sightings were recorded in Kurnool District by Rajiv Mathew, M S Kulkarni and Aasheesh Pittie, members of the Society, when they birded these areas along with Richard Grimmett, Senior Programme Officer, Asia Division, BirdLife International. On 21.2.96, 2 flocks totalling 3000-3500 demoiselle cranes were seen 30 km before Kurnool town. Late in the night on the same day, a Jerdon's courser stood hunched in a beam of torchlight near Reddipalle village. This is a wonderful area for birding and easily accessible to a persistent birder. Great caution is necessary when visiting the area, as the Jerdon's Courser is a gravely endangered species endemic to AP. On 22.2.96 nearly 500 harriers *Circus* sp. came in to roost at the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary.



The BSAP also arranged a special Indoor Meeting on 24.2.96 at Max Mueller Bhavan for an audio-visual presentation by Mr. Richard Grimmett, on the status of grassland birds world-wide. The talk was followed by a lively and illuminating discussion on various subjects.

41 species of birds were recorded by the members, during their field trip to Mahavir Harin Vanasthali on 10.3.96. Of these, 5 were migrants. A paradise flycatcher played hide-and-seek inside the dry branchlets of small shrubs near the water hole. Members also observed the magpie-robin, black drongo, a displaying purple sunbird, a silent hawk-cuckoo and heard the screams of a stone curlew. As the day grew warmer, 3 species of vultures, whitebacked, longbilled and scavenger, began soaring above the park.

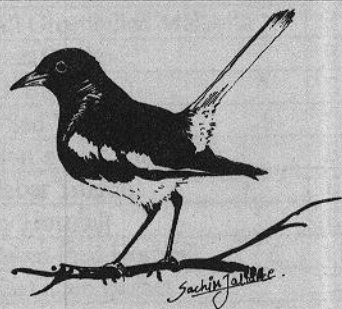
Some interesting snippets from the Seminar conducted by the BNHS, commemorating Dr. Salim Ali's centenary year (*Pitta* no 52-54), are given below.

- Whitebacked Vultures nest on houses in Kutch.
- Harriers consume c. 15-18 numbers of locusts per day in Velavadar National Park i.e., 2,000 harriers which are estimated to roost there, would consume almost 40,000 locusts per day. Farmers appreciate this by not farming inside the park.
- Birds of prey are smuggled from India to Pakistan inside baskets full of betel leaves, by women!
- Villagers in Uppalapadu village near Guntur, complained that noise made by the birds in the heronry there prevented them from hearing TV programs, so crackers are burst to scare them away!

A new journal has recently been launched called *SoundSnipe*. This is 'a magazine of acoustic ecology' and is edited by Virendra Singh, who welcomes papers on bird acoustics. Interested persons may write to B1-297 Janakpuri, New Delhi 110058.

"The blue-gray and yellow Kirtland's warbler is a bit smaller than a house sparrow. It has been a victim of habitat loss in the only place in the world that it nests - a small area in Michigan's northern lower peninsula. The most interesting fact about this habitat loss is that it isn't due to condo construction or the opening of a new golf course, but to the *control* of forest fires. The Kirtland's Warbler is a ground nester with very precise nesting requirements: It breeds only in central Michigan in *young* stands of jack pine with low-hanging branches that nearly touch the ground. In the past, immature stands of jack pines regularly sprang up as the result of naturally occurring forest fires, caused by lightning. In modern times such fires have been suppressed to prevent loss of large stands of timber. As a result, young stands of jack pine became rare - and with them the Kirtland's warbler." [Ashcraft, J.D. (1995) Kirtland's Warbler. *Birdwatcher's Digest*. 17(6): 36-41.]

"No one was more immersed in the mysteries of bird vocalizations than the late Ted Parker, team leader of Conservation International's Rapid Assessment Program and widely regarded as the leading authority on birds of the new-world tropics. His knowledge of bird sounds was unparalleled, as evidenced by an event that has become legendary among field ornithologists. In June 1983, walking along the edge of a flooded forest in northern Peru and carrying, as always, his \$12,000 Swiss-made tape recorder, Parker heard a song he didn't recognize. Catching only a glimpse of the bird as it flitted through the dense tropical foliage, Parker concentrated on what he heard. He listened intently, taped the bird's song, and listened again and again to the tape until he decided that it was a flycatcher in the genus *Tolmomyias* (neotropical flycatchers that are as difficult to distinguish from one another as our North American *Empidonax* flycatchers); but the call of this flycatcher didn't sound like that of any of the known species, and it had an orange eye, which no other *Tolmomyias* flycatcher had. It might be something new, an undiscovered species, Parker thought to himself. For anyone else to arrive at such a conclusion would have been folly, but Parker's aural memory was uncanny. He could identify as many as 4,000 species of birds by ear alone. Subsequent field work on the flycatcher he saw that day proved him correct, and the bird's song was a key factor in the decision that it was a new species. "Some species of birds are weakly differentiated bio-chemically," Parker told me several months after his discovery, "and yet they are reproductively isolated. Vocalizations can be even more important than biochemical analysis, especially if you can do experiments to see if the birds recognize individuals of their own species from other localities." [Stap, D. (1995) The bird sessions. *Audubon* 97(6): 56-63, 117.]



The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History (SACON) and Birdlife International's

Asia Council, in commemoration of the birth centenary of the late Dr. Salim Ali, are organising the First Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress (PASOC) and the BirdLife Asia Conference (held once in 4 years), from 9-17 November 1996 at Bangalore. PASOC will evaluate the current status of ornithological research in Asia and identify gaps as at meetings of Neotropical Ornithological Congress and Pan African Ornithological Congress. The Congress will highlight regional ornithological issues and give impetus and guidelines for future research. Seminars, poster sessions, round table discussions and workshops will be organized on various topics. The Birdlife Asia Conference will bring together BirdLife Partners, representatives, staff and collaborators to review and develop the BirdLife Asia Programme, and strengthen the network of organizations and individuals working for conservation of birds and their habitats in the region. It will include presentations on existing and future BirdLife Asia projects, as well as training courses, poster presentations and workshops on priority conservation and institutional development issues. Registration charges for SAARC delegates is Rs. 300/-. For further details contact Dr. V.S. Vijayan, National Coordinator, SACON, Kalampalayam P.O., Coimbatore 641010.

OBITUARY

M. Krishnan, aged 83, naturalist, wildlife expert, photographer, writer, story-teller par excellence, passed away on 17.2.1996 after a brief illness. He was awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship for an ecological survey of the animals of Peninsular India in 1968, the Padmashri in 1970 and the Global 500 Roll of Honour of the UNEP in 1995. He was a member of several wildlife committees at the Centre and in several states and had undertaken wildlife surveys in 14 states. His was the longest running nature column in an Indian (english) newspaper, which he wrote (fortnightly) for *The Statesman* for over 30 years. In his passing the country has lost one of its most committed naturalists and conservationists. [Adapted from the Bulletin of the Madras Naturalists' Society (March-April 1996)].

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Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher.

Illustrations: Sachin Jaltare.

IPITTA

8/6/96

No. 62

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

June 1996.

PROGRAMME

23rd JUNE - Chilkur Deer Park - 7.30 a.m. This is a half day trip.

FIELD OUTINGS : Members are requested to reach the destination on their own.

INDOOR MEETING : 12th : Audio-visual presentation by Dr. A.R. Rahmani, Director, Centre for Ornithology & Wildlife, Aligarh Muslim University. - Max Mueller Bhavan Auditorium, Ramkote - 6.00 p.m.

EDITORIAL

"I came to know the Bird of Birds - the Indian crow-well, by and by, and be infatuated with him. I suppose he is the hardest lot that wears feathers. Yes, and the cheerfullest, and the best satisfied with himself. He never arrived at what he is by any careless process, or any sudden one; he is a work of art, ad 'art is long'; he is the product of immemorial ages, and of deep calculation, one can't make a bird like that in a day. He has been reincarnated more times than Siva; and he has kept a sample of each incarnation, and fused it into his constitution. In the course of his evolutionary promotions, his sublime march towards ultimate perfection, he has been a gambler, a low comedian, a dissolute priest, a fussy woman, a blackguard, a scoffer, a liar, a thief, a spy, an informer, a trading politician, a swindler, a professional hypocrite, a patriot for cash, a reformer, a lecturer, a lawyer, a conspirator, a rebel, a royalist, a democrat, a practiser and propagator of irreverence, a meddler, an intruder, a busybody, an infidel, and a wallower in sin for the mere love of it. The strange result, the incredible result, of this patient accumulation of all damnable traits is that does not know what care is, he does not know what sorrow is, he does not know what remorse is, his life is one long thundering ecstasy of happiness, and he will go to his death untroubled, knowing that he will soon turn up again as an author or something, and be eve more intolerably capable and comfortable than ever he was before.

"In his straddling wide forward step, and his springy sidewise series of hops, and his impudent air, and his cunning way of canting his head to one side upon occasion, he reminds one of the American blackbird. But the sharp resemblances stop there. He is much bigger than the blackbird; and he lacks the blackbird's trim and slender ad beautiful build and shapely beak; and of course his sober garb of gray and rusty black is a poor and humble thing compared with the splendid lustre of the blackbird's metallic sables and shifting bronze glories. The blackbird is a perfect gentlemen, in deportment and attire, and is not noisy, I believe, except when holding religious services and political conventions in a tree; but this Indian Sham quaker is just a rowdy, and is always noisy when awake- always chaffing, scolding, scoffing, laughing, ripping, and cursing, and carrying on about something or other. I never saw such a bird for delivering opinions. Nothing escapes him, he notices everything that happens, and brings out his opinion about it, particularly if it is a matter that is none of his business. And it is never a mild opinion, but always violent and profane- the presence of ladies does not affect him. His opinions are not the outcome of reflection, for he never thinks about anything, but heaves out the opinion that is on top of his mind, and which is often an opinion about some quite different thing and does not fit the case. But that is his way; his main idea is to get out an opinion, and if he stopped to think he would lose chances....." (Mark Twain in Following The Equator. Taken from Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1985) vol. 25(506): 4-5.)

NOTES & NEWS

In February 1995, a workshop was organized by Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), BirdLife International (BLI) and BirdLife International Asian Council for discussion on a Red Data Book for the Birds of Asia. This workshop is a part of the Global Action Plan of BLI to save the bird species from extinction. 30% of the threatened birds of the world exist in Asia and the list (of threatened birds) is getting longer every year.

There is an urgent need for collating available information on the status, habitat and ecology of each of these species and the various threats to their existence and also to generate data on these lines whenever required. These data are to be published as the Red Data Book of the Birds of Asia (Threatened Birds of Asia) in 1999 and will be the third of its kind, the first being for Africa (1985) and the second for the Americas (1992). The major objectives of this book are:

- * Identify and fully document all globally threatened species in the Asian region,
- * Identify the principal threats to the birds of Asia and,
- * Indicate and prioritize action for all threatened species in terms of key sites, habitats and appropriate management.

This project will succeed only with the unstinted cooperation of the Indian birding fraternity. The Red Data Book will publish the names of all contributors and sources who will help in making it possible.

Members of the Society have been entrusted to compile data on the following

6 species of birds; Sykes's Crested Lark *Galerida deva*, malabar Crested Lark *Galerida malabarica*, Forest Owlet *Athene blewitti*, Broadtailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyura*, Brownwinged Kingfisher *Pelargopsis amauropterus*, Brownbreasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*. Readers are requested to send their notes and observations to the address at the end of this bulletin.

Mahesh Chander Mehta, environmental-lawyer from New Delhi, is one of the winners of the coveted Goldman Environmental Prize (US\$ 75,000), the Nobel Prize of the environmental movement, for 1995. This award is financed by the heirs to the Levi Strauss blue-jeans fortune, and is given to "grass-roots heroes" in six regions of the world. Mehta, filed his first environment related petition seeking protection for the Taj Mahal almost 10 years ago. In 1993 the supreme court finally closed 212 small factories near the Taj for failing to install pollution-control devices; more could be shut down in the future. In another case where he protested the pollution of the Ganges, the court has told 5,000 factories along the river to install such equipment and ordered some 250 cities and towns in the river's basin to set up sewage-treatment plants. Mehta's lawsuits have established an important precedent in Indian Law: that individuals whose health or property has been damaged by pollution are entitled to compensation by the polluters. [adapted from Time, April 29, 1996 p 67].



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Editors: Ashesh Pittie & Siraj Taher.

PITTA

No. 63

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

July 1996.

PROGRAMME

Wed 19/7/2001

FIELD OUTING: 21st: Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park (Chiran Palace). Members are requested to reach the destination on their own and meet at the entrance facing L V Prasad Eye Hospital before 7:30 a.m.

EDITORIAL

The President
and
the Members of the Executive Committee of
the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh
*cordially invite you to the release of
the 12th revised and enlarged centenary edition of
Salim Ali's,
THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS
on Monday, 8th July, 1996 at 6.00 p.m.
Darbar Hall, Raj Bhavan
His Excellency Shri Krishna Kant
Governor of Andhra Pradesh
has kindly consented to release the book*

For further details please contact: Rajiv Mathew (310721), Aasheesh Pittie (315683), Siraj Taher (312607). Your participation will make this prestigious function a grand success for the Society.

NOTES & NEWS

Dr. Asad R. Rahmani was the speaker at the indoor meeting at Max Mueller Bhavan on 12-6-96. "Grassland habitats and birds" was the topic of his illustrated talk. He started by explaining the different types of grasslands in various parts of India and their significance.

Then he dealt in some detail about the various birds found in these grasslands with specific emphasis on the bustards. The most numerous of the bustards is the houbara which is a migratory bird mainly to the NW region, from central Asia. Some other grassland birds are the

swamp partridge, bustard-quails, common cranes (which play a symbiotic role in grassland ecology) and great Indian bustards. With the continuous decimation of grasslands, some birds like the swamp partridges are trying to adapt to changed habitats like sugarcane fields. Dr. Rahmani spoke of the symbiosis between chinkara and blackbuck and the bustards. The increase in population of rhino and swamp deer in the terai region (Manas and Kaziranga) has resulted in excess grazing. Poaching of wildlife is also on the increase.

According to Rahmani, the only two places where the great Indian bustard population is increasing is at Rollapadu (Andhra Pradesh) and Sholapur (Maharashtra). There are considerable problems of survival for the bustards at Karera (Madhya Pradesh) and Desert National Park (Rajasthan) and their overall population is on the decline in the country. *At Karera, there are 22 watchmen and no bustards !*

The bengal florican seems to be doing well at Manas and Kaziranga. But the population of the lesser florican is still erratic at Rollapadu. It is difficult to keep a track of the lesser florican as it spreads all over the country during the non-breeding period, even though it remains fairly confined to a particular area during the breeding season, which is during the south-west monsoon. The greatest danger to the floricans, as also to the bustards is the loss of grasslands. The main threats to the grasslands are afforestation programmes, spread of agriculture and also the unhindered spread of *Prosopis juliflora*. The speaker highlighted the usefulness of grasslands to man in that they are fodder banks for the country's cattle population and should be scientifically harvested (generate employment) for this purpose. A very interesting BBC film on the natural history of the Indian monsoon was screened by Dr. Rahmani for the members. An enjoyable evening came to an end with the customary vote of thanks.

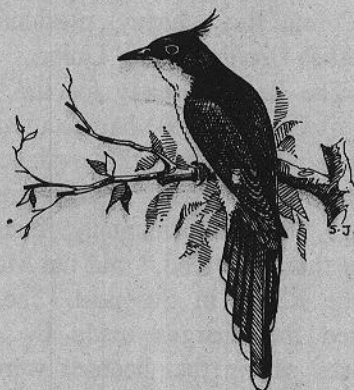


Lesser Florican

The India-Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) has approved a grant of Rs. 9.90 crores to M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Madras to assist in the implementation of mangrove conservation and management. The ICEF-MSSRF project will operate over a period of five years and will involve forest officials and local population in seven sites spread over four states - Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. The project aims at addressing the interlinked issues of poverty, gender and environment focusing on land and water management in the project areas. (*The Hindu* 27.6.96)

There is no doubt that *The Book Of Indian Birds* by the late Dr. Salim Ali is the bible of the amateur Indian bird-watcher. He had revised and enlarged the book in 1979 when the 11th edition was published. This edition described and illustrated 296 species and was reprinted 5 times, the last being in 1992, when it was decided to enlarge the book. This revised and enlarged edition of the book is being brought out to commemorate the centenary of Dr. Salim Ali and his seminal contribution to the popularization of the study of birds in India, which began with the publication of the 1st edition of the book 55 years ago in 1941. The centenary edition of the book describes 538 species and is illustrated by the noted bird artist Carl D'Silva in 64 plates. Each of the species illustrated in the plates has been provided with brief captions giving status, whether resident or migratory, size and form, key identification characters, habitat and distribution, followed by the detailed description of the 538 species. The black and white photographs of the earlier editions have been replaced with new colour photographs. All the

local names available in publications on Indian birds have been included. The book is published by Oxford University Press and Bombay Natural History Society and is priced at Rs. 395/-.



Pied Crested Cuckoo

The India-Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) has approved a grant of Rs. 9.90 crores to M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Madras to assist in the implementation of mangrove conservation and management. The ICEF-MSSRF project will operate over a period of five years and will involve forest officials and local population in seven sites spread over four states - Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. The project aims at addressing the interlinked issues of poverty, gender and environment focusing on land and water management in the project areas. (*The Hindu* 27.6.96)

In the struggle for existence, the feathered creatures are losing out to the denizens of the deep. Every year, Scotland carries out licensed killing of at least a thousand wild birds to save salmon. Conservationists claim that there is no scientific justification for the cull. The Scottish Office (SO) is under fire for obliging fisherfolk by permitting more birds to be shot than in England and

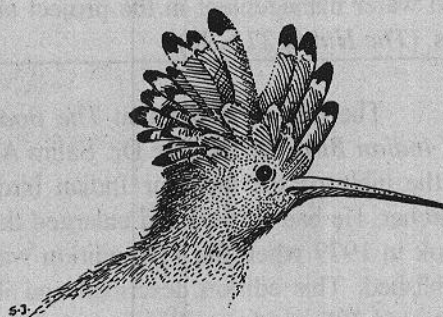
Wales. The SO fisheries department has issued 568 licenses to fishing organisations to kill 4,946 goosanders, 3,730 mergansers and 4,420 cormorants over the past 13 years. "There is no proof that these birds do serious damage to fish stocks," said Ray Murray, president of the Scottish Ornithologists' Union.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has accused the SO of holding back scientific evidence on which it decides to grant applications for licenses. "We fundamentally question whether this is justified," said Ian McCall from the RSPB in Scotland. The SO dismissed the charges made by ornithologists, saying that licenses were issued "to prevent serious damage to fisheries." (*Down To Earth* 5(3): 6.)

As per the directive of the Supreme Court, the first green bench in the judicial history of the country sat at the Calcutta High Court on June 3. The bench will deal exclusively with environmental and pollution control matters and was set up following a judgment on a writ petition filed last year by the Howrah Ganatantrik Nagarik Samity. (*Down To Earth* 5(3): 10.)

The field trip to Chilkur Deer Park was well attended by members who were overjoyed to see a 9 month old toddler out on her maiden birding trip ! We were told by the forest dept. staff that Chilkur was a *kancha* (grassland) till 1977 when it was declared a deer park and fenced off. The growth of vegetation in a span of 20 years, both trees and undergrowth, is remarkable and a monument to nature's ability to heal herself when left undisturbed. Laburnum blossoms brightened the verdure everywhere. A delicious fig-sized orange-hued

fruit was abundant but un-named. Male ioras were in song, resplendent in their breeding plumage of black cap and back. The pied crested cuckoo thrilled us with good views and a cascade of calls. The rough, scraping call of the painted partridge came from somewhere, hawking "paan-bidi-cigarette"! Someone espied a small greenbilled malkoha. A crested honey buzzard dipped low over the group. Franklin's wren-warblers sporting their grey breasts rasped creakily from bush tops. A hoopoe, spread its crest, perched on a wire.



Hoopoe

Dr. Kumar Ghorpade has written to point out some mistakes which inadvertently crept into *Pitta* No. 57-61, Jan-May '96. The small green barbet and malabar crested lark are not found within the boundaries of A.P. and should not have been on that list of endemic birds in the editorial. The editor's apologies to Krys and our readers.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FEES ARE DUE FOR 1996-1997. KINDLY SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE ADDRESS BELOW AT THE EARLIEST.

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PITTA

No. 64

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh

August 1996.

7/8
96

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 11th: CIEFL Campus, Osmania University. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own and meet at the entrance of the campus at 7:00 a.m. We will be joined by the children who live on the campus, and their parents. This will be a half day trip.

EDITORIAL

For any organization to have a meaningful existence and a motivated membership, it is very necessary for it to have some purposeful activity involving as large a section of its members as possible. In the past, the activities of the Society have centered around familiarizing members with the birds of Hyderabad city and surrounds on fortnightly or monthly field trips and also occasional nature camps at various locations in Andhra Pradesh. In the process of this exercise, a fairly comprehensive checklist of the birds of the Hyderabad region has been compiled and a not so detailed one for the other areas covered by members of the Society. A few projects like 'Habitat Survey' and 'Nesting Birds and Flowering Trees' were started in the past, but they petered out after a year or two, mainly due to lack of enthusiasm. One project however, the members have undertaken with a lot of dedication for the past few years. This is the Asian Waterfowl Census.

A time has come now for us to take stock of the situation and decide as to what the Society wants to do ! Do we want to continue with a Sunday 'club' type of existence with an occasional out-of-city camp, or do we want to take up some purposeful and meaningful activity ? Initially, keeping in mind the amateur composition of the Society, it becomes necessary to decide and take up only such activities which conveniently involve a large group of members. This activity / project should provide useful data to be maintained by the BSAP, for future use by anyone working on the birds of A.P. In short, the Society must strive to start and build-up a sort of data bank. Individual members may already be having a good amount of data which can now be requisitioned from them to create a nucleus of records for future work. There are several simple activities to start with, like 'Nest Record Survey', 'Line Transect Survey', 'Roosting Site Survey', 'Heronry Survey', 'Study of Bird-Plant Symbiosis', etc. The only requirement is a sense of purpose and continuity in whichever activity is begun, with sincere data collection and recording. Experts in the field of ornithological methods can be requested to initially instruct and guide us. In course of time even mist-netting and bird-banding could be taken up. Let us begin and take the BSAP forward !

NOTES & NEWS

Good examples of hoarders are species - but not all of them - belonging to the woodpeckers, jays, nutcrackers, and nuthatches. Groups of acorn woodpeckers, for instance, will defend a granary or storage site consisting of a number of dead trunks and limbs studded with acorns. Imagine up to 50,000 acorns crammed tightly into a single snag! Jays and nutcrackers do not go to as much trouble. They stuff their usual fare of nuts, seeds, acorns, pine cones, and other similar items that do not spoil easily into the ground or under loose debris or even into elevated cracks in trees. The trick is in remembering where the items are put. Clark's nutcrackers appear to be masters at that game. While we humble humans are trying to remember where we last put our car keys, these remarkable birds can store anywhere between 22,000 and 33,000 pinyon pine seeds in a given season, caching four or five seeds in each hideaway. The seeds are usually hidden in late summer and fall and are used as these birds' major food source during the winter months.

How are some bird species capable of such incredible memory? It is the contention of two collaborating scientists, Dr. F. Nottebohm of Rockefeller University and Dr. A. Barnea of Tel Aviv University, that birds like the black-capped chickadee simply "grow a new brain" each fall. Over a two year period, they injected a radioactive tracer compound called thymidine into 74 adult chickadees of both sexes captured in a study area of 500 hectares of meadows, woods, and marshes ... in Millbrook, New York. Thymidine was chosen because it is able to be incorporated into any cells that divide, including brain cells.

Its presence essentially indicates the process of cell division and hence, new cell growth. After releasing the birds, 42 were recaptured roughly six weeks later. As a control, another group of chickadees were kept in an aviary, given plenty of food, and administered thymidine also. When the brains of both the free-living chickadees and those in captivity were examined for presence of thymidine, the greatest amount of new neural growth was found in the free-flying birds. Although the process appeared to be happening throughout the year, the peak of regeneration was greatest in the month of October, exactly when chickadees perform the greatest amount of seed-caching. Something like 2 % of the neurons were being replaced on a daily basis. In short, at a time when the chickadee has to become extra sharp, not only to cache seed, but also to store "prominent global features of the environment" in its tiny brain, it grows new neurons in its hippocampus. The hippocampus, a part of the brain, has long been thought to be associated with memory storage and spatial learning. Thus, each fall the chickadees lose certain neurons of memory and grow new ones to remember their seed locations. In that way, the brain size is kept at a consistently small size, appropriately adapted for lightness and, consequently, flight. (excerpted from Bird, D. M. (1996): Caching and hoarding behaviour. *Birdwatcher's Digest* 18(2): 114-123.).

Dr. Salim Ali's *The Book of Indian Birds* (12th revised and enlarged centenary edition) was released in a very well attended function in the Durbar Hall, Raj Bhavan, by H.E. Shri Krishan

Kant, Governor of Andhra Pradesh. In his address to the gathering, the Governor spoke about birds in the cultural heritage of India. He appreciated that local names of birds were used in the text, but pointed out that had they too been indexed like the English names, the usefulness of the book would have increased a great deal. This function was organized by the BSAP, in fond memory of the doyen of Indian ornithology, the late Dr. Salim Ali. The Society wishes to thank the little songsters from Oxford Grammar School, who sang the invocation and the national anthem at the end of the function. The work put in by volunteers of the Society, to make this function a success, is also gratefully acknowledged. The book is priced at Rs. 395/- and should be available in the market within a month.

Phoebe Snetsinger, the World's leading lister, passed her goal of 8,000 species with a Rufous-necked Wood Rail in Mexico in September last year. Incredibly, this represents over 80% of the entire World list. Despite passing this target, Phoebe will, of course, carry on listing, but apparently "at a more relaxed pace"! (King, J (1996): Ornithonews. *Birding World*. 9(2): 77.).

Jugal Kishore Tiwari has won the OBC's Forktail/Leica Award to study the White-naped Tit *Parus nuchalis*, an endangered Indian endemic. He will use the £ 1,500 grant, generously sponsored by optics manufacturer Leica, to assess the distribution and status of the White-naped Tit in the tropical thorn forest of western Rajasthan, and prepare a conservation action plan for the Indian authorities. The thorn forest is also home to other restricted range species such as Mahratta

Woodpecker *Picoides mahrattensis* and Green Munia *Estrilda formosa*, and Tiwari's survey work will enable him to log records of these birds too. (*Birding World* 9(2): 80.)

The BSAP has received a wonderful gift of a Kodak Carousel slide projector with accessories from the director of the local chapter of Max Mueller Bhavan, which, unfortunately for Hyderabad, is being closed down. The Society is extremely grateful to the director of MMB for this kind gesture.

The Bihar state forest and irrigation departments have recently made a move to lease the protected wetlands of the State to the fishermen cooperatives. Udhawa Bird Sanctuary, situated 50 km east of the district headquarters of Sahabganj bordering West Bengal, is among the six notified protected wetlands in the State under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and fishing and shooting in the sanctuary is strictly prohibited, which houses a veritable treasure trove of riverine life. According to activists of the Mandar Nature Club, a voluntary organisation of nature enthusiasts responsible for 'rear-ing' the sanctuary for the past six years or so, 20,000 winged guests arrived at the sanctuary this winter (as per the census carried out by the Asian Wetland Bureau). The practice of leasing Udhawa lake for fishing was stopped in 1993 after the lake was notified as a protected bird sanctuary. Meanwhile, the backward fishermen and boatmen community have risen in protest against the government move. Officials have already gone ahead and leased two protected sanctuaries - Nagi and Nakti - in the neighbouring Jamui district, whereas the process of leasing Udhawa is under way

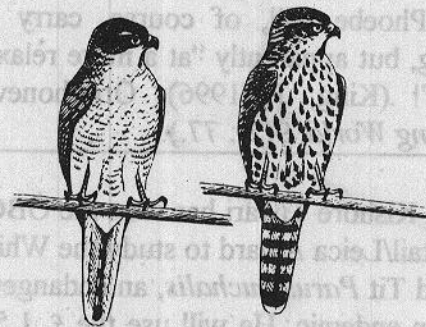
with the government having accepted a deposit of Rs. 90,000 from the favoured cooperative. (*Pioneer*, New Delhi, 26-6-1996. News item sent by A.R. Rahmani.)

Britain and Morocco are probing the mystery deaths of 20% of the world's bald ibises, a rare species threatened with extinction. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said that 41 adult birds and their chicks, a fifth of the surviving population, have died recently in the Souss-Massa National Park, near Agadir, in Morocco. This has dealt a devastating blow to one of the world's most weird and wonderful birds. Post-mortem examinations have so far failed to find a cause of the death of the birds. (*The Hindu* 19-7-1996).

Notwithstanding the drizzle in the morning, a dozen members of the Society and a large group from the defense services, comprising mostly children and a few parents, assembled at the Brahmananda Reddy National Park, Hyderabad. Divided into groups, they went round the park with a lot of enthusiasm, sometimes rather vocal ! Whenever the drizzle became a little sharper, several umbrellas popped up. One of our members and some children had even donned their rain coats and there were some with no protection at all. The sighting of the day was drenched and fluffed-up Sirkeer Cuckoo *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*, a first time for most of us. Unfortunately the children's group had left by the time this uncommon bird was seen. The black-winged kite seemed to be nesting on one of the several neem trees in the park and one bird was seen at another spot, perched on a tree, completely drenched ! An Indian myna was observed carrying some small twigs in its bill. Also seen

were black drongo, large grey and white-headed babblers, grey partridge, iora, pariah kite, Indian robin and lots of vociferous peafowl. Members heard the call of painted partridge, crow-pheasant, plaintive cuckoo and the coppersmith barbet. Some members, rather keen to visit the pond, were rewarded with the sighting of the spotbill duck (a flock of 10), little grebes and one small blue kingfisher. M.S. Kulkarni spelled out plans for a weekend trip by bus to Mananur in the Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve and logistics were worked out. (Read about this trip in the next *Pitta*!). The trip ended with wet clothes and high spirits !

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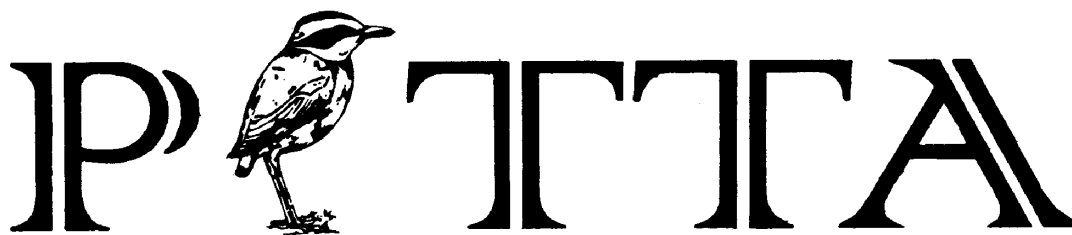
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PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 9-8-1998, 7.30 a.m.: K.B.R. National Park (Chiran Palace grounds): We meet at the main gate. This will be a half day trip. Bring rain-wear if necessary. We plan to show members simple census techniques.

KBR National Park is a walled protected area of about 300 acres, in the Jubilee Hills locality of Hyderabad city. The vegetation is a typical Dry Deciduous and Thorn Scrub forest with a variety of big and small bushes, some grassland areas spread all over and native tree species like Custard Apple *Annona squamosa*, Ber *Zizyphus* sp., Soap Nut *Sapindus mukorossi*, Neem *Azadirachta indica* and Tamarind *Tamarindus indicus*. Several exotic trees like Cashewnut, Mango *Mangifera indica*, Teak *Tectona grandis*, Eucalyptus *Eucalyptus* sp., *Terminalia* sp., among others have been planted. There is a small seasonal *jheel*, where water collects during the Monsoon and remains till the commencement of the dry season in March, providing a niche for wetland wildlife. The park is experiencing an increasing influx of 'walkers' in the morning and evening, which may disturb the wildlife if left unchecked. This park, like an oasis in the middle of a concrete desert, is home to many a resident bird species. In August one will come across the Grey *Francolinus pondicerianus* and Painted Partridge *F. pictus*, Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*, Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Blackwinged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Little Brown *Streptopelia senegalensis* and Ring Dove *S. decaocto*, Roseringed *Psittacula krameri* and Blossomheaded Parakeet *P. cyanocephala*, Pied Crested *Clamator jacobinus* and Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Large Grey *Turdoides malcolmi* and Yelloweyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*, Franklin's *Prinia hodgsonii* and Ashy Wren Warbler *P. socialis* and of course the ever present Small Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* and the Iora *Aegithina tiphia*. So keep a look out for these. If you are lucky, you may see the Dabchicks *Tachybaptus ruficollis* nesting at the pond or near the check dam. Go quietly, and enjoy!

INDOOR MEETING: 17-8-1998, 6 p.m.: A talk by Alamdar Moosavi, "Rethinking in the forest sector about ecology and environment". Vidyaranya High School, Opposite Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

BIRDS OF ZIMBABWE AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
Humayun Taher

Countries in Africa, specially in the Central, Eastern and Southern region, are famous for their natural habitats, scenic beauty and wildlife. Zimbabwe ('Southern Rhodesia' before 1980) is no exception. The country, with a very moderate climate having temperatures between 10°C and 30°C in different regions and at different times and an average rainfall of about 1,120 mm has an interesting and varied vegetation. Large areas of tropical woodland, dominated by *Brachystegia* sp., trees in high altitudes, is interspersed with grasslands. This occasionally gives way to scrub. (*Coleophospermum* sp.) The diverse vegetation is responsible for an interesting variety of mammal and bird species. While the Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha* has only 30 breeding pairs in Zimbabwe, the Redbilled Quelea *Quelea quelea* is a scourge with 50 million birds being *harvested* in a *bad* year. About 640 species of birds have been recorded with nearly 35% being resident species. As it is a tropical country, there is a lot in common with the bird species in India, at least at the species level, e.g., Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Dabchick *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, Rednecked Falcon (Redheaded Merlin) *Falco chicquera*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, Wiretailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Little Brown Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* and several others. Of course, it is a different matter that many of these birds have different names. While our Pariah Kite *Milvus migrans* is a Yellowbilled kite in Zimbabwe, what they call "Forktailed Drongo" is our Black Drongo. Another bird with a different name is our Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* which is called Blackbreasted Snake Eagle. We were surprised to know that the Little Brown

Dove is their Laughing Dove and that the Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* is a Jacobin Cuckoo to a Zimbabwean. Some of the very important birds to be found in Zimbabwe are the Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*, Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*, Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*, Grey Lourie *Corythaixoides concolor*, Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus*, Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, Pintailed Whydah *Vidua macroura*, Ostrich *Struthio camelus*, Saddlebill Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*, Crowned Crane *Balearica pavonina*, Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*, Hammerkop *Scopus umbretta*, Helmeted Guinea-fowl *Numida meleagris*, Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* and many more. Several of these species can be found in other parts of Africa (like Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, etc.). Zimbabwe being a very green country, its birds are seen everywhere. They seem to demand your attention all the time. Many can be seen close to human habitations and even build nests in houses or close to buildings.

Since the country is well endowed with flora and fauna, it is a popular spot for tourists and Tourism is a major foreign exchange earner and a major government enterprise. The Zimbabwean Government has drawn up wildlife management plans involving the local population and tries hard to strictly implement them. Despite various short-comings and problems, like poaching and hunting, the Department of Games and Parks seem to be doing a good job. Private wildlife and game farmers are a ray of hope in the conservation movement in the country. There are several animals which are threatened and need special measures for their protection. Amongst these are the rare Black *Diceros bicornis* as well as the White Rhino *Ceratotherium simum*, Oryx

Oryx algazel, Roan Antelope *Hippotragus equinus*, Lichtenstein's Hartebeest *Alcelaphus lichtensteini* and others. Paradoxically the African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* is not protected in Zimbabwe as the country is heavily over-populated with these animals. Hence the Game Department culls them to keep the numbers in check. For the rhinos, de-horning is being resorted to, to counter poaching. Ivory is un-officially exported as are rhino horns. With these measures and better and sincere management of the areas and its wildlife, Zimbabwe could probably overcome its problems and give a boost to wildlife tourism.

[Based on a talk given by the author at the BSAP's meeting on 15-6-1998].

Increasing silt load and spreading nets of prawn culturists are slowly throttling **Chilka**, Asia's biggest salt water lake spread over 1,100 kms. It is estimated that rivers and rivulets such as Nuna, Kusumi and Salia carry about 13 million tons of silt into the lake along with fresh water every year. The consequent fall in the lake's salinity level has led to the disappearance of many species of fish and other marine creatures. Now, only 69 species of fish can be spotted in the lake, according to the Zoological Survey of India as against 126 species in 1920.

The increasing silt load has also threatened the lake's core island of Nalabana that is home to thousands of migratory birds during the winter. Nalabana has been declared as a bird sanctuary by the government.

[*Down to Earth* Vol.: 7, No:3, - January 30, 1998]

Members were delighted by the display of trapping birds by using mist nets, by Suhel Quader, on the Society's outing to **Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park**, Hyderabad. Two birds, a male and a female Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata* were trapped. Measurements were taken, a BNHS ring was clipped onto each birds' tarsus and after showing the birds to the group

and answering excited questions, they were released. An interesting character pointed out by Suhel was the brood patch on the female robin, which was just beginning to regain its feathers. The bird has been nesting! Earlier, on a short walk, Pied Crested Cuckoos *Clamator jacobinus* were heard and later members had good sightings of the bird. Also seen were an immature Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, a threesome of Small Minivets *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* were feeding on insects attracted to the blossoms of Eucalyptus trees. Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica* were proclaiming territories stridently in the vein of their tribe and a Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* sipped nectar from the flowers of a *Randia dumetorum* bush. A single Ashy Swallow-Shrike *Artamus fuscus* floated above for sometime, finally alighting at the tip of a bare branch, resembling an owl! Innumerable Small Green Bee-eaters *Merops orientalis* with the central tail feathers missing were also seen.

The Garrulax Corner

According to the Knight-Ridder News Service, the inscription on the metal bands used by the U.S. Department of the Interior to tag migratory birds has been changed. The bands used to bear the address of the Washington Biological Survey, abbreviated "Wash. Biol. Surv.", until the agency received the following letter from an Arkansas camper:

"Dear Sirs:

While camping last week I shot one of your birds. I think it was a crow. I followed the cooking instructions on the leg tag and I want to tell you it was horrible."

The bands are now marked "Fish and Wildlife Service."

[Contributed by CT Hash]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST 18

"[Science] teaches men to take an interest in things outside and beyond the gratification of the animal instinct and the sordid and selfish cares of worldly advancement; it teaches a love of truth for its own sake and leads to a purely disinterested exercise of intellectual faculties." [A.O. Hume, Letter dated 7 November 1880]

"..... alike to young and old, the study of Natural History in all its branches offers, next to religion, the most powerful safeguard against those worldly temptations to which all ages are exposed. There is no department of natural science the faithful study of which does not leave us with juster and loftier views of the greatness, goodness, and wisdom of the Creator, ÄÄ that does not leave us less selfish and less worldly, less spiritually choked up with those devil's thorns, the love of dissipation, wealth, power, and place, ÄÄ that does not, in a word, leave us wiser, better and more useful to our fellow-men." [A.O. Hume to the Government of North-Western Provinces, 2 March 1867]

"With European museums and libraries to consult, Mr. Blanford supplies many of our deficiencies and corrects errors which, situated as we are here, are at times inevitable.

It is impossible to overrate the assistance that ornithology in India would receive from similar critiques at home of our work here." [A.O. Hume, Notes in *Stray Feathers*, 1: 417; 1873]

With all the eights (octaves) 'on' this month (*vide supra*, see above), it would be appropriate to devote this Letter to Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912), perhaps the ornithologist closest to my heart, through his singular example. My Journal *HUMEA*, *Field Ornithology* is dedicated to him and will hopefully take after his masterpiece *Stray Feathers* (1872-1888/9, 11 Volumes), as time goes on and good manuscripts come in from serious colleagues. Aasheesh Pittie, who has been so helpful with information, as well as a source of much needed intellectual interaction and encouragement over the years of our friendship, recently sent me the social scientist E.C. Moulton's manuscript on "The Contributions of Allan O. Hume to the Scientific Advancement of Indian Ornithology". This is perhaps the most detailed documentation and appreciation of Hume's life and work, and was read by me with great interest. For *HUMEA* I have been trying to obtain information about Hume so as to write about him. Antony Witherby, in his Obituary of Dr Charles Vaurie (*Ibis*, 118: 426-427; 1976) mentioned that a little before Vaurie died, he was planning to write "a biographical work on Allen [*sic*] Hume". Enquiries with the Bird Sections of museums in New York (where Vaurie and his entomologist wife Patricia worked) and Paris, for information about Vaurie's manuscript, have drawn blanks, and whatever exists is perhaps in London? Vaurie, incidentally, wrote a monographic *The Birds of the Palaearctic Fauna* (2 Vols, 1959 & 1965, H.F. & G. Witherby, London), which revised Ernst Hartert's *Die Vogel der pälaarktischen Fauna* (3 Vols, 1910-1922, R. Friedländer, Berlin).

Almost exactly a quarter century ago, on 31 July 1973, the Indian Posts and Telegraphs Department issued a postage stamp and first day cover in honour of Hume. It is eminently appropriate that, as this month marks the end of the 50th year celebrations of our independence, this Letter is written in appreciation of this then retired, British official, of the Indian Civil Service, who was one of

the principal founders (on 27 December 1885) of the Indian National Congress, an avowedly non-communal national institution (*not* a political party!), “an offspring of British rule” as the 70 Indians (including British ones like Henry Cotton, William Wedderburn and David Yule) proudly described it when they inaugurated the first session at Bombay, presided over by W.C. Bonnerjee. The then Viceroy of India, Lord Dufferin, cordially welcomed this “child of the British Raj” and advised Hume “definitely to aim at the political education of the people” (see R.P. Masani, 1960, *Britain in India*. An account of British rule in the Indian subcontinent”, Oxford University Press, Bombay, xv+278 pp., 13 pls, 5 figs). Masani further wrote that “If Hume might be called, what in fact he was, the father of the Congress, Dufferin might well be called the godfather.”..... “Hume was one of the few members of the Indian Civil Service who sympathized with the people’s aspirations to obtain self-government under British paramountcy”..... “India’s debt to these Englishmen and to Hume in particular, who devoted all his time and energy to the work of the Congress in the days of its infancy, was gratefully acknowledged by contemporary Indians but has since been forgotten. Nor have the British people ever fully realized how the part played by that sprinkling of British radicals in India should fill all Britons with pride.” Incidentally, I may also mention here that a journal *India* was started in 1889 when the British Committee of the Congress was formed in July of that year with Wedderburn as Chairman and Dadabhai as Agent, its office in Craven Street, Strand, London. “A delegation consisting of Surendranath Banerjee, R.N. Mudholkar, Hume and Eardley Norton toured England during the year 1890 to appeal to the British public to support the Congress in its demand for reform in the administration of India.” The second session of the I.N.C. was held at Calcutta and presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji and, by the time Badruddin Tyabji appealed to Muslims as President of the third session at Madras, “there was a rift in the lute, and the bureaucracy fell foul of the infant Hercules.” A half century since independence and 11 decades after founding of the I.N.C., the feared inevitable seems to have finally happened - “transferring the government of India from the Crown to an Indian parliament and at the substitution of Hindu for British Raj”. I wonder what Hume would’ve thought?

In the *Times of India*, many years ago, Latha Nair wrote of “Hume’s Home”, the Collector’s Residence (*Zilladhihari Bhavan* now) in Etawah, built by Hume in 1853.... “Like the other buildings that Hume built, this house too is typical of his style”.....a now 145 year-old “expansive rambling architecture with its cavernous halls and domed roofs tower[ing] over the rest of the district - in keeping with the status of its tenant” with a.... “compound [that] sprawls over many acres. Trees abound and each collector seems to have contributed to creat[ing] an ideal forest consisting of neem, shisham, peepal, banyan, tamarind, and amla, with groves of mango, jamun, bel, kaitha, amrut and eucalyptus. The trees are a paradise for birdwatchers.....may be a hundred and odd years ago A.O. Hume might have sat right here drafting the constitution of the Indian National Congress. And some day my trivial jottings will attain more than ‘middle’ status.” I hope they have now, Latha!

Hume served as Collector & Magistrate of Etawah District, in the then “North-Western Provinces” (Uttar Pradesh now), west of Lucknow and north-east of Gwalior, in the Upper Gangetic Plain, where the Chambal and Sind rivers flow into the Yamuna. It was here, eight years after he began his career in India in 1850, that Hume started building his famous bird collection. During the Indian Mutiny of 1857, his so far acquired specimens were destroyed, in the rebellion of that year, but, Hume recommenced collecting, with more determination, after this initial loss. When he left Etawah in mid-1867, on being appointed as Commissioner of Inland Customs, his collection comprised some 2,500 specimens. It was only in 1868, when he’d turned 40, that Hume began publishing his studies of Indian birds. Youngsters of today, well under that prime age, needn’t be in a hurry to publish their results (*scientific* ones, not amateur ‘notes’) until they have *matured* and gained sufficient understanding of Ornithology. The Smithsonian’s ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (1994: 139-144) lists 105 titles written by Hume, from 1870-1890, and the BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX compiled by Aasheesh Pittie (1995) includes most of Hume’s work published in *Stray Feathers*. Hume’s huge collection of ‘Indian’ bird skins and eggs consisted of about 82,000 specimens, which was bequeathed to the British Museum of Natural History, London, in 1885, the year the I.N.C. was founded in India. This collection was perhaps his most permanent contribution to Science, besides his famed *Stray Feathers*, made possible by writings of himself and of a network “of more than fifty” bird collectors and observers located “between Cape Comorin and Peshawar and from Nepal to Gujarat, as well as in all parts of Burma” (vide G.F.L. Marshall).

That Hume ‘failed’ to give Indian Ornithology a seminal, monographic work like Jerdon, Oates & Blandford, Stuart Baker, and now Salim Ali & Ripley did was because of a shameful act by his disgruntled former servant. In the winter of 1883 (the year the B.N.H.S. was founded in Bombay), when Hume was away from “Rothney Castle”, his spacious and beautiful bungalow on Jakko Hill high above Simla’s Mall, where Hume’s museum and library were located, this pathetic native, of little or no education, intellect or morals I presume, sold “a large number of books, and an enormous mass of ornithological M.S.S.” (vide Moulton) as *waste paper* in the bazaar! This stolen literature included all of Hume’s notes for his projected *Birds of the British Indian Empire*, about 6,000 sheets of his own museum’s *Bird Catalogue*, and the entire completed revised edition of his *Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds*, besides other smaller writings.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, Hume had acquired an interest in Theosophy and wrote to R.B. Sharpe that “ornithology has no longer the interest for me that it once possessed.” Returning to England in 1894, after retiring as General Secretary of the I.N.C., and settling in south London, he developed a scientific interest in Botany, which led to his helping in the writing of local floras and he also established (through his personal endowment) *Hume’s South London Botanical Institute*, at 323 Norwood Road, London, which houses more than one lakh British botanical specimens and a library of some 3,000 volumes. Moulton does not specify whether Hume had any interest in Insects, except that after heavy rains during that fateful winter of 1883 at Simla, he had discovered that his “bird skins in the damaged boxes got wet and insects were beginning to invade the specimens.” This prompted Hume to decide to ship his entire bird collection to London.

Moulton has given very interesting insights into Hume’s “organizational skills, love of nature, and disenchantment with urban, bureaucratic life.” Hume had called Preparis Island (north of the Andaman & Coco Islands), a “paradise”, compared to Calcutta, which he described as “that most detestable of all abominable places....where.....everything smells, except the flowers! Incidentally, Enrico Brunetti, my Dipterist ‘hero’, who also bequeathed his insect collection and library to the British Museum, hated the crows of Calcutta, besides the working conditions at the Indian Museum building in that city. He used to go about shooting crows every morning and evening, with a small collector’s gun, to lessen the torment he faced every working day, from their incessant cawing!

--- Dr Kumar Ghorpade

[Errata: In Letter 16 Å Line 1 of text should read "Vasco da Gama". In Letter 17 Å Line 1 of penultimate para should read "1995", and Line 2 of last para should read "habits".]

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park

LARGE GREY BABBLER 17.7: CB, N under const., by 2 birds with thin twigs c. 8' up slim tree beside path (AP); INDIAN WREN-WARBLER 25.7: CB, N bldg & sitting in N (no eggs), c. 60 cm above ground in thin scrub only 2 m from path! (CTH); WHITETHROATED MUNIA 17.7: CB, N under const., beside trail, c. 3' up in bush (AP).

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Chilkur Deer Park 21.6 (AP)

LARGE GREY BABBLER PRB, with N-mat.; WHITETHROATED MUNIA PRB, with N-mat.

VISHAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Kondakarla Lake 27.12.1997-2.1.1998 (JP)

GREAT CRESTED GREBE 5; LITTLE GREBE 27; LITTLE CORMORANT 19; GREY HERON 3; PURPLE HERON 3; LARGE EGRET 7; CHESTNUT BITTERN 2; YELLOW BITTERN 1; PINTAIL 14; COMMON TEAL 65; SPOTBILL DUCK 12; GARGANEY 300+; SHOVELLER 18+; REDCRESTED POCHARD 124+; COMMON POCHARD 60+; COTTON TEAL 126+; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 2; MARSH HARRIER 3; OSPREY 1; BAILLON'S CRAKE 4; PURPLE MOORHEN 62. CB 2N with eggs; COOT 600+; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 145+; BRONZEWINGED JACANA 26; REDSHANK 2; MARSH SANDPIPER 1; GREEN SANDPIPER 22; SPOTTED SANDPIPER 8; SNIPE Sp? 26; PAINTED SNIPE 2; BLACKWINGED STILT 60; WHISKERED TERN 72; RIVER TERN 1; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 2; SWALLOW 80; BLACK DRONGO 76; PIED MYNA 41+; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 8; BLACK REDSTART 1; BLUEHEADED YELLOW WAGTAIL 88; YELLOWHEADED WAGTAIL 22; WHITETHROATED MUNIA 30.

GOA

MAPUCA DISTRICT

Baga 18.7 (CTH)

BAYA CB N colonies numerous in coconut palms on paddyfield bunds. Fledged imm & ad., in br., plm.

MAHARASHTRA

NASHIK DISTRICT (BR)

Gangapur Dam

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 17.6; REDWATTLED LAPWING 2.6: CB, 1 ad., 4 eggs (an laid on alternate days). 30.6: 28th day 1 egg hatched & 29th remaining 3 hatched.; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 13.6: CB, 2 ad., 3 yng. Incubation period 24 days; INDIAN COURSER 3.6: CB, 2 ad., 2 yng. 5.6: CB, 2 yng; SYKES' CRESTED LARK 13.6: CB, 2 ad., 2 eggs. 15.6: CB, 2 ad., 1 egg.; PADDYFIELD PIPIT 13.6: CB, 1 N, 4 eggs.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (AP); B Raha (BR); CT Hash (CTH); J Palot (JP).

ERRATA: In *Pitta* 87 p. 4, under 'Kerala, Idikki District, Munnar 8-12.5' read "Shaheen Falcon".

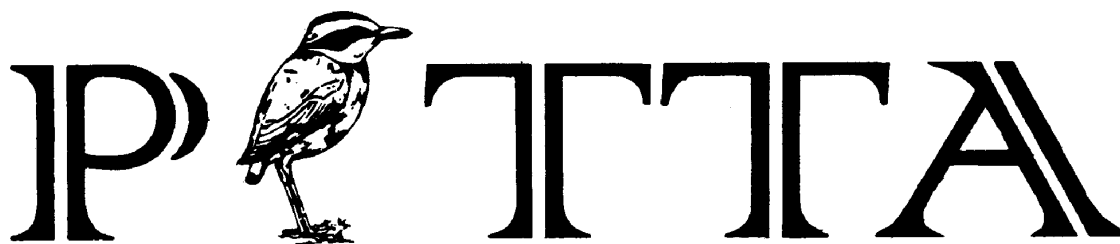
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. E-mail: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN.



PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 6-9-1998, 7.30 a.m.: Andhra Pradesh Police Academy, Himayat Sagar: We meet at the main gate. This will be a half day trip. Bring rain-wear if necessary. Breakfast hosted by Sri Jaspal Singh, Director of the Academy. The Academy has a 180 acre campus of which c. 50 acres have been left untouched. Mostly broken bouldery country with red laterite soil and scrub flora. A trip on 30-11-1997 yielded 39 species, including Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*, and 3 species of Harriers *Circus* sp.

20-9-1998, 7.30 a.m.: Dundigal Airforce Academy: We meet at the main gate of the academy. This will be a half-day trip. Bring rain-wear in necessary. Buses should be available to Dundigal from the city. Those to Narsapur and Medak via Narsapur will stop at Dundigal on request.

INDOOR MEETING: 21-9-1998, 6 p.m.: Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

Managerial matters! Discussion about issues regarding the Society's aims, objectives and members' role and perceptions about achieving these. Discussion about the participation of the Society in environmental-activism. Scope and methods. All members are requested to participate and make the meeting a success.

EDITORIAL : Whither Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park?

Have you been to this park lately? If not, do go, for the monsoon has triggered a vibrant fecundity of growth to produce an innumerable variety of animal and insect life. The thrill of a fluttering Common Rose *Pachliopta aristolochiae* amidst stands of grass, stops me in my tracks. I gaze in amazement at this beautiful butterfly, with its crimson body, black wings and pinkish spots on the hind wings. Little do we realize that the park may contain the specialized plants on which its caterpillars feed, the *Aristolochia indica* of the Birthwort family. A unique climber whose flowers have perfected the art of cross pollination by ensuring that a visiting insect is properly doused with pollen before it flies off. They trap the insect inside a tube where it is dusted with pollen and then allowed to fly away! Butterflies are visible everywhere. Common Crow *Euploea core*, Lime Butterfly *Papilio demoleus*, Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus*, Tailed Jay *Graphium agamemnon*, Common Jezebel *Delias eucharis*, Crimson Rose *P. hector*, etc., sail and flutter over the vegetation in wonderful abandon. The Monsoon has brought much more. With the first rains came hordes of Velvet Mites (Arachnidae), crawling across the trails, invariably squashed by unconcerned walkers, who as children must surely have squealed with delight and collected them in matchboxes, as are centipedes and caterpillars while they cross over from one green patch to another. Moisture in the soil and atmospheric humidity feed clusters of mushrooms and bracket fungus, which spring up miraculously, overnight, under shrubs and on dead wood. Bare ground sprouts monsoonal ephemerals which blanket all open areas, except those regularly used by 'walkers'. The tiny white flowers of *Oldenlandia umbellata* [Rubiaceae] and *Leucas aspera* [Labiatae] are the most common. Amidst this carpet of delicate white you see the occasional red flower of *Almanea nudiflora* [Amaranthaceae] and proud stalks of Wild Sesame *Sesamum indicum*, reputedly the first seed from which man extracted oil! The dynamism of this habitat is awesome in its range of natural phenomena. Little rills flow here and there and water collects in depressions, filtering gradually down to subterranean springs. It does not flow away for it's fall is broken by vegetation to be sponged up by the thirsty ground. In fact, the only places where shallow gullies have formed by washed away soil, is on the barren paths! Left to its own designs, Nature takes care of itself following rules and patterns which have evolved over more years than our imagination can comprehend. But is Nature being given this chance?

Witness the management of the park since its inception. Paths have been cleared, broadened and re-laid with coarse red laterite (mooram) soil so that people may have better paths to walk on. The result is that with this imported soil have arrived seeds of Congress Grass *Parthenium* sp., which is the scourge of our countryside, responsible for colonizing vast tracts of land in no time. *Parthenium* was never found in the park earlier, but can be seen now as the seeds have taken root. Fresh paths have been created where there was rocky ground, grassland or shrubbery earlier! No study was done on the fauna of these areas before the paths were laid. The unfortunate victims have been Stone Curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* and Ashycrowned Finch Larks *Eremopterix grisea*. The fate of lesser known species is not known at all. We do not know what we have destroyed.

The latest catastrophe is the planting of trees all along paths and in grasslands. Does the management not realize that once these trees grow, they will shade out the grasslands? Or are grasslands worthless to a management which can only see 'timber'? The loss of grasslands in KBR will lead to the disappearance or drastic reduction of populations of a host of birds, small mammals and insects that are dependent upon this habitat. One of the handsomest birds commonly seen and appreciated here, which has virtually disappeared from the surrounding areas, is the Blackshouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*. This elegant predator, whose hunting technique of hovering and stooping combines grace, skill and strength, is a fit subject in itself for a conservation programme. Yet here, it is the victim of the thoughtless actions of the management of the Park that are jeopardizing its very existence.

The blackshouldered kite will not be the only participant in this disappearing act. It will be accompanied into the twilight by the Grey Partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus*, Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelianus*, Stone Curlew, Yelloweyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*, Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica*, Streaked Fantail Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*, and migratory birds like the beautiful Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus. Even our National Bird, the Peacock *Pavo cristatus*, found in relative abundance today, will be drastically reduced in numbers once these grasslands disappear, as seems inevitable unless prompt and drastic action is taken to reverse this highly retrograde programme. It must be noted that a number of butterflies, at least 2 species of dragonflies and many other insects will also be adversely effected. It is an absurdity that the authorities maintain a pretense of proper management by implementing a zoning policy on the one hand and violate the most basic and fundamental tenet of habitat management on the other.

This is clearly an unacceptable state of affairs and the A.P. Forest Department must reverse its ill conceived programme, immediately stop planting trees in open areas and remove those trees that have been planted in the past two years so as to restore the integrity of the grassland habitat. Unless this is done, KBR National Park can abandon all pretense of being a wilderness and sink quietly to the status of recreational park or plantation.

[Aasheesh Pittie & Hashim Tyabji. for Botany: Y. Malini.]

NOTES & NEWS

Ahmedabad Nature Lovers' Association (ANALA), is a registered Public Charitable Trust, functioning under the guidance of a core group of 7 trustees who are committed to conservation through nature education. 13 year's old ANALA has already conducted more than 100 nature education programmes for the benefit of thousands of students drawn from over 50 schools all over Gujarat. ANALA has been very kind in allowing members of the BSAP to participate in their programmes. Though participation is primarily from the student fraternity (10-18 years), members interested in the following programmes should contact Aasheesh Pittie at the phone number given at the end of this bulletin or ask for a Xerox copy of the brochure at cost.

GIR NATIONAL PARK & SANCTUARY'99: 4 batches of 50 students each. 3 days 2 nights camps from 7/2 to 17/2. Charges Rs. 650/-.

LAKSHADWEEP ISLANDS, PERIYAR SANCTUARY, KOCHI & ATHIRAPILLY WATERFALLS'98: 14 day trip in Oct.-Nov. 5 days at Lakshadweep, 1 day at Kochi & 2 days at Periyar. Charges Rs. 7,500/- (for bonafide students. For others, Rs. 2,000/- extra).

MOUNT ABU'98: 10 batches of 50 students each: 4 days 3 nights camps from 30/9 to 31/10. Charges Rs. 600/-.

NEPAL'98: 1 trip from 22/10 to 3/11. Charges Rs. 6,500/- for bonafide students. For adults, Rs. 1,500/- extra.

"At present time hawks are scarce or absent from many British woodlands, but in Ireland quite a few woods still have their resident pair of sparrowhawks. It is interesting to speculate upon the effect that a pair of these **predatory birds** would have on a small **bird community**. It has been suggested that a pair of sparrowhawks to satisfy the needs of their young and themselves would need some 2,000 small birds a year, and this would mean a maximum density for sparrowhawks of one pair per square mile. Should the hawks be taking only diseased or abnormal birds in preference to healthy ones, then the final result could be a rise and not a decrease in the prey population. After a study of the hunting behaviour of several species of birds of prey it was estimated that only 5% of sparrowhawk attacks were successful; there was also evidence that out of 23 successful strikes 7, and possibly 9, were upon birds abnormal in behaviour or condition. The high rate of failure provides some support for the theory that there is a selective effect upon the prey species. It is obviously of no advantage to the predator to reduce the level of prey numbers too severely in the area. Unfortunately we do not yet know how effective predators are in limiting the numbers of birds. Owls, crows, magpies, jackdaws and jays may affect the numbers of young birds reared. In the case of the song thrush, predation is the most usual cause of nesting failure and it is reported that only 14% of the blackbird nests at Wytham resulted in fledged young, due to predation, compared with 50% of the nests in the Oxford Botanic Garden. On the whole, predator-prey relationships seem unlikely to be the most important factors regulating bird numbers, but they cannot be ignored.

"Since predators that specialise in rodents may have a greater density in woodland than hawks, the relationships between tawny owls and their prey have been intensively studied, also at Wytham. Here up to 30 pairs bred in an open broad-leaved wood stretching over some 1,000 acres of countryside. This was a self-contained population of owls in which the adults were strictly sedentary and the young wandered only a very few miles away. Their diet was noted throughout the year by analysing the small mammal remains in the regurgitated pellets; the most important prey species were the wood mouse and the bank vole which together made up in roughly equal proportions nearly 60% of the total prey. The rest of the mammal prey consisted of short-tailed voles, common shrews and moles. A variety of other foods was taken when mice or voles were scarce, and included beetles, earthworms and small birds such as chaffinches. Southern in a classic experiment demonstrated that the owls were very territorial by marking the mice with leg-rings and mapping both their place of release and the recovery point of the ring at one of the pellet stations. The breeding success of the owls varied with the density of the wood mice and the bank voles. The proportion of breeding owls was higher in the years when mice were abundant than in years when they were scarce. In 1958 no pairs out of the thirty present in fact bred, and this was a bad year for small mammals. In contrast, in 1949, 1950 and 1956, when rodents were plentiful, over 75% of the owl pairs bred. The clutch size also varied from 2.0 in a bad year to 3.0 in a good year. The average number of owls raised was three times as high in years when rodents were fairly common as in years when they were very scarce. Although there was a rise in the population numbers during the period of the study, the population at Wytham remained fairly stable. This comparative stability has been attributed to territorial behaviour since the number did not fluctuate with the density of wood mice and bank voles. The correlation between bad years for rodents and poor breeding success in the owls is very clear, and the lack of food would seem to be directly responsible for the high loss of eggs and chicks. Mortality may be an important factor in the control of numbers and Southern has concluded that density-dependent mortality is an important regulator even in populations which appear to control their own levels by a territorial spacing." [Simms, E. (1990): *Woodland Birds*. Bloomsbury Books, London.]

In May/June this year (Pamela C.) **Rasmussen** returned to the North Dhule area in Maharashtra where the owlets [**Forest Spotted Owlet**] were discovered and found that though they were still there, their habitat was virtually being ripped apart. The Taloda forests that she refers to were clear-felled to make way for resettlement of communities to be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam. This double tragedy (the dam and then the deforestation) has proven to be completely pointless as the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* had rejected the resettlement site long before the first tree had been felled.

The report: "We repeatedly relocated what must be the same pair along the Shahada-Toranmal road, in various parts of their territory. But we have so far failed to find any others. This is probably due to the low incidence of calling at this time of year, as well as to their rarity. The known pair has already tolerated a lot of disturbance: they stay near the road, even though buses and trucks go by every so often as do pedestrians, herds of cattle and goats. They do not even move when herds go through their forest. But one day when grass cutters were working in the area we could not locate the birds. And there is a lot more of wood cutting right in this site itself; numerous big trees have been felled and are just lying on the ground, and some areas are quite open. But the worst is that several new fields have been cleared in the area just in the past six months, since we were there in November! They are encroaching on all sides, even within half a kilometer from the site, and I fear that unless something is done that site will be lost very soon. These are all illegal clearings according to the F.D. officials. While of course the fate of an entire species can hardly rest on a single pair, it would still be tragic if these birds were lost.

"Farah Ishtiaq is going back to search for more owlets in that area and other likely spots for the next three months. It will not be easy to find them, judging from our experience these past two weeks, it will be a slow process. We were quite disheartened to see what is happening in Taloda, where in the 1880s James Davidson found most of the Forest Owlets ever recorded. Large areas of the plains forest have already been cleared for the GOI rehabilitation project, and the wood is stacked in huge piles. There is still one degraded patch left, which if protected could become a very good representation of the once widespread plains forest, but it is slated to be entirely cleared this July and August. Farah will spend the next two weeks surveying that doomed area both for birds and for vegetation. We spent two days there but did not find the Forest Owlet. However, they must be there because this is what is left of the habitat in which they were originally recorded.

"This bird is much less like a Spotted Owlet than is generally realized in plumage, morphology, skeletal anatomy, behaviour and voice. I do not believe it is necessarily closely related to any other species of owl. This only increases its interest and conservation importance. Once seen and studied it cannot be confused with the Spotted Owlet, so I am sure that the data Farah produces in future will be reliable." [*Sanctuary Asia* 18(4): 65-67.]

"It is a general rule of **ecology** that (very roughly) only about 10 % of the sun's energy captured by photosynthesis to produce plant tissue is converted into energy in the tissue of herbivores, the animals that eat the plants. Of that amount, 10% reaches the tissue of the carnivores feeding on the herbivores. Similarly, only 10% is transferred to carnivores. And so on for another step or two. In a wetlands chain that runs from marsh grass to grasshopper to warbler to hawk, the energy captured during green production shrinks a thousandfold.

"In other words, it takes a great deal of grass to support a hawk. Human beings, like hawks, are top carnivores, at the end of the food chain whenever they eat meat, two or more links removed from the plants; if chicken, for example, two links; and

if tuna, four links. Even with most societies confined today to a largely vegetarian diet, humanity is gobbling up a large part of the rest of the living world. We appropriate between 20 and 40 percent of the sun's energy that would otherwise be fixed into the tissue of natural vegetation, principally by our consumption of crops and timber, construction of buildings and roadways, and creation of wastelands. In the relentless search for more food we have reduced animal life in lakes, rivers, and now, increasingly, the open ocean. And everywhere we pollute the air and water, lower water tables, and extinguish species.

"The human species is, in a word, an environmental hazard. It is possible that intelligence in the wrong kind of species was foreordained to be a fatal combination for the biosphere. Perhaps a law of evolution is that intelligence usually extinguishes itself."

"This admittedly dour scenario is based on what can be termed the juggernaut theory of human nature, which holds that people are programmed by their genetic heritage to be so selfish that a sense of global responsibility will come too late. Individuals place themselves first, family second, tribe third, and the rest of the world a distant fourth. Their genes also predispose them to plan ahead for at most one or two generations. They fret over the petty problems and conflicts of their daily lives and respond swiftly and often ferociously to slight challenges to their status and tribal security. But oddly, as psychologists have discovered, humans also tend to underestimate both the likelihood and impact of such natural disasters as major earthquakes and great storms.

"The reason for this myopic fog, evolutionary biologists contend, is that it was actually advantageous during all but the last few millennia of the 2 million years of existence of the genus *Homo*. The brain evolved into its present form during this long stretch of evolutionary time, during which humans existed in small, preliterate hunter-gatherer bands. Life was precarious and short. A premium was placed on close attention to the near future and early reproduction, and little else. Disasters of a magnitude that occurred only once every few centuries were forgotten or transmuted into myth. So today the human mind still works comfortably backward and forward for only a few years, spanning a period not exceeding one or two generations. Those in past ages whose genes inclined them to short-term thinking lived longer and had more children than those who did not. Prophets never enjoyed a Darwinian edge." [Wilson, E.O. (1996): *In Search of Nature*. Penguin Books, London.]

The Society has begun a fortnightly Nature education class in Vidyaranya High School, for students of class VII. Besides a general introduction to birdwatching, emphasis is given to audio-visual presentations, study of school compound flora and fauna, etc. Exposure is given to basic concepts of ecology, environment and its importance in today's world, optimum utilization of non-renewable resources, etc.

Errata: *Pitta* # 88 August 1998: p. 1, left column, 15th line from bottom, read '5 million' instead of "50 million."

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH**HYDERABAD DISTRICT****Hyderabad City** 3.7 (SAT)

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 bird purchased from market, ringed, measured and released.^{@1}

Somajiguda: Hyderabad City (RM)

SHIKRA 10.7: 2 of race *cenchroides*?[@]; COMMON BUSTARD-QUAIL 8.7.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT**Chevella Grasslands** 21.7 (rm) (RM)

TAWNY EAGLE; RAIN QUAIL; PAINTED PARTRIDGE; ROCK BUSH QUAIL; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING CB, with chicks. Also several N., with 3 eggs each.; GREEN SANDPIPER 2; INDIAN COURSER several groups of over 25 birds each; COMMON SANDGROUSE CB, several flocks with yng in flight.

KARNATAKA**BANGALORE DISTRICT****Bangalore City** 27.6 (JS)

BAYA CB, 4 N with F possibly incubating. 1 N under const.

Badamanavarthe State Forest 12.7

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO hrd (JNP); COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO hrd (JNP); MOTTLED WOOD OWL 1 (SS,AA); PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD PRB N under const (AA).

Banashankari: Bangalore City 1.7 (DA)

ASHY WREN WARBLER PRB, N under const., c. 7' up in shrub.

Bannerghatta National Park 20.6 (SK)

GREY TIT PRB, 1 bird feeding orange caterpillar to another ad (courtship?).

Guttahalli: Bangalore City 29.6 (JNP)

INDIAN MYNA PRB, const., N under eaves.

Kasturinagar: Bangalore City 25.6 (PSM)

INDIAN MYNA CB, ad., carrying Papaya to N in end of 35' pipe.

Lalbagh: Bangalore City 28.6 (JNP)

LITTLE CORMORANT PRB, 1 imm; BRAHMINY KITE PRB, 1 imm., attacking Purple Moorhen, on top of Rain Tree *Enterolobium saman*. Abandoned when latter took to water; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN PRB, 1 imm; PURPLE MOORHEN see Brahminy Kite above.

Palace Grounds: Bangalore City 27.6 (PSM)

REDWATTLED LAPWING CB, ad., defending 2 yng; ROSERINGED PARAKEET CB, ad., feeding 1 chick in N-hole 30' up in Coconut tree; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO 3.

Shivanahalli 20.6 (PSM)

INDIAN MYNA CB, N with 2 yng in Coconut tree - amidst fruits!

Vasanthnagar: Bangalore City 30.6 (RK)

HOUSE CROW CB, N with 2 yng in dense canopy of Mast Tree *Polyalthia longifolia* c., 13' up.

MANDYA DISTRICT**Maddur** 28.6 (SS, KM, SM)

LESSER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER POB, inspecting N of Roseringed Parakeet.

MAHARASHTRA**AHMADNAGAR DISTRICT** (SuK)**Kapurwadi Water Reservoir** 25.7

SPOTBILL DUCK CB, 4 ad., 2-3 yng; REDWATTLED LAPWING CB, ad., & yng; PIEDED CRESTED CUCKOO; CROW-PHEASANT PRB, carrying twigs to N; BAYA PRB, 6 N., under const.

NASHIK DISTRICT (BR)**Cambala Tank**¹ 28.7

DABCHICK CB, 2 N with ad., incubating; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 13; COOT 14; COTTON TEAL POB, 2 M in br., plm.; PURPLE MOORHEN 8; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA CB, 2 different ad., with 3 chicks each.

Gangapur Dam

REDWATTLED LAPWING 25.7: CB, 2 ad with 2 yng.; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 4.7: CB, 1 ad., with 1 chick.; SYKES' CRESTED LARK* 4.7: CB, N with 2 eggs. 10.7: CB, N with 3 eggs.; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER* 4.7: CB, N with 3 eggs. 7.7: CB, N with 3 eggs. 28.7: CB, N with 3 eggs.; BAYA 7.7: PRB, N under const.;

Pandavleni Hills²

HOUSE SWIFT 14.7: POB, N seen in crack between rocks.; DUSKY CRAG MARTIN 18.7: PRB, N const., with birds daubing wet mud on cups on rocks.; BROWN ROCK PIPIT 25.7: PRB, 2 birds with grass in bills; BAYA 14.7: PRB, N const., on Peepul *Ficus religiosa*; CRESTED BUNTING 14.7: CB, N below stone slab, on ground, with 2 eggs. F incubating.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Andheria (AA); B Raha (BR); D Ajit (DA); J Sudhir (JS); JN Prasad (JNP); K Manu (KM); PS Madhusudan (PSM); R Kumar (RK); R Mathew (RM); SA Taher (SAT); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Madhusudan (SM); S Subramanya (SS); S Kurhade (SuK).

NOTES:

^{@1} For further details contact BSAP.

[@] Birds measured, ringed and released. Suspected of this race. For further info., contact BSAP.

* All N., of both species within 1 km² of grassland.

¹ 1km² tank c. 20 km from Nashik. Vegetation: Lilies, reeds, grass, etc.

² 10 km from Nashik, c. 700' altitude. Plantation work by forest dept 15 years ago, with *Gliricidia*, *Bombax*, *Ouegina*, *Onansis*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, etc. Good natural regeneration also including *Ceropegia sahyadrica* a Red Data Book herb.

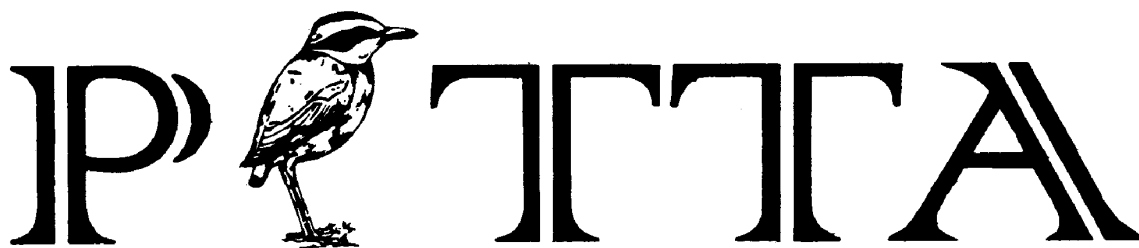
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

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For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Note: Dr Kumar Ghorpade's Letter will be resumed next month. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607)

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. **E-mail:** AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN.



PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 25-10-1998, 8.00 a.m.: Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 8.00 a.m. An A.P. Forest Dept vehicle will start from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta at 7.00 a.m. Those requiring transport may reserve a place. Contact Aasheesh / Siraj (3350683 / 3352607). This will be a full day trip and members should carry a light lunch and water. Hourly buses, starting at 5.30 a.m., to Medak via Narsapur, leave Imliban Bus Stand and Jubilee Bus Stand, Secunderabad. Narsapur R.F. is the closest patch of forest to Hyderabad and harbors many species which are not found within the city. These include Goldfronted Chloropsis *Chloropsis aurifrons*, Whitethroated Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanotus*, Grey Tit *Parus major* and a fascinating variety of small passerines.

INDOOR MEETING: 26-10-1998, 6 p.m.: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004. Managerial matters! Discussion about issues regarding the Society's aims, objectives and, members' role and perceptions about achieving these. Discussion about the participation of the Society, in environmental-activism. Scope, and methods. All members are requested to participate and make the meeting a success.

EDITORIAL : WHAT'S IN A NAME?

It started as the Birdwatcher's Club of Andhra Pradesh in 1980 and became the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP) in 1983. There was great fun for all the members during the regular field trips—excitement in watching birds and joy in identifying them. Senior members gave guidance to the newcomers and film shows, talks and camps further added to the knowledge of the participants and the Society grew. Now there is more emphasis on bird studies and conservation. A great deal of data has been collected on birds and their distribution, status and ecology. Members have compiled checklists and bibliographies, written articles to journals and attended seminars and workshops. Some have even found the Society a stepping stone for their careers. The BSAP has conducted a national seminar and a state-level workshop and some of its members are on the national and international fora for bird studies and conservation. In short, the Society has attained maturity.

This being the background, it is time for us to think and ponder whether there is need for a change in the name of the Society. The word BIRDWATCHERS' does not seem to convey the seriousness of purpose of the organization. Even the Objectives of the Society never limited the work of the Society to just 'bird watching'. In fact, on a couple of occasions in the past, the name seemed to have conveyed to some people that it is an "elitist group" while to others it looked like a "club". Many were unable to appreciate the seriousness of our purpose and the importance of our work. Considering all this, a slight change in the name of the Society might now be necessary. It is proposed that the word BIRDWATCHERS' be replaced with BIRD, changing the name to BIRD SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH. This way, the abbreviation still remains the same—BSAP, but it will make a whole lot of difference in the way others perceive us.

We are a Society of amateurs (though some scientists are also our members), working for bird conservation, and shall remain so. We shall continue to do bird watching and also have fun. BSAP, over the years, has come to be recognized as an important bird organization in Andhra Pradesh and India, and is perhaps one of very few membership-based societies dedicated to bird conservation! But let us—wear our laurels lightly and with composure. Any change, if necessary, should be seriously considered. This is our Society, so let us do all that is necessary to take it further and higher.

A lot of interesting developments seem to be in store for the Society and the bird conservation movement in our country. It is an opportune time to think of a change. Let us all deliberate and come to a conclusion on the suggested name change. When you have decided, do write back to us so that steps can be taken to bring about the change. In the meantime, remember the axiom—"A rose by any other name will still smell just as sweet."

[Siraj A. Taher]

NOTES & NEWS

NOTICE

20-10-1998

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh will be held on Monday, 16 November 1998, at 6.00 p.m. at Vidyaranya High School, Green Gates, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004. You are requested to attend the meeting. Please treat this as the official Notice to the AGM.

AGENDA

1. Honorary Secretary's Report.
2. Presentation of accounts by Honorary Treasurer.
3. Appointment of Auditors.
4. Change of name of Society.
5. Any other business.

Note: Only those persons who have paid their membership for the year 1998-1999 are eligible to attend the AGM. Members

can pay their membership dues before the commencement of the AGM and attend the meeting.

We welcome Mr. Heinz Lainer as Regional Referee for Goa. Mr. Lainer has been bird watching in Goa for the past 18 years and is well versed with the avifauna of India's smallest state.

Bombay Natural History Society is organizing their annual Sálím Ali Bird Count 1998 in November. Limited Forms have been received by the Society. Members willing to participate may contact the Hon. Secretary for Xerox copies. Counts should be done on either 12 November 1998 or a holiday closest to this date. Counts done after 16 November 1998 will not be accepted. Completed Forms should be returned to the BSAP office for forwarding collectively to the BNHS. Your active participation will make a success of this program. Mr. S. Asad Akhtar, Coordinator of this Count, informed the Hon. Secretary, in a recent meeting, that Forms will be analyzed and an annual Report circulated to participants.

The Society has received a box of slides as a gift from member, Mr. Hashim Tyabji. We thank him for his kind gesture and urge others to emulate his example by donating slides to the Society. Members of the Society are putting the Society's collection of slides to good use in various education activities in schools and nature clubs.

The 6 September trip to A.P. Police Academy was a sell-out! For the first time in the Society's history, there were more bird-watchers than birds seen! All credit and thanks to Sri Jaspal Singh, Director and Sri S.A. Huda, Jt Director for their exemplary hospitality, cooperation and encouragement (the Academy has become a Corporate Member!).

Walking through the wilderness areas of the campus, one was struck by the many bushes of the exquisite Glory Lily *Gloriosa superba*, with its attractive red and yellow flowers. Suhel

Quader mentioned that it is known as "Vagh Nakh" in Marathi, for "Tiger's Claws"! How descriptive! This was truly one of the highlights of the day.

Someone suspected they saw a Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*. On closer examination it turned out to be a male Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* on its nest! Many of us had good views. Four species of Prinias were present. Jungle *P. sylvatica*, Plain *P. inornata*, Ashy *P. socialis* and Franklin's *P. hodgsoni*. All were in song and a pair of Plain Prinia was seen carrying food in their beaks, into a bush. Calls of both Painted *Francoolinus pictus* and Grey *F. pondicerianus* reverberated through the campus. Members of a small colony of Bayas *Ploceus philippinus* went about their business of intricate nest weaving interspersed with energetic female pursuit, male chasing and phlegmatic wheezing – in no particular order. Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* was heard and seen. A Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* caught an updraft and sported with Pariah Kites *Milvus migrans*, a member of which species was electrocuted on overhead wires as Rajiv Mathew and Mohd. Azam watched it pluck a live Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor* from the grass and fly up to the wire with it. There, losing its balance, a wing touched another wire, thereby completing the fatal circuit. The specimen was used to point out a birds' topography to the new and younger members present.

The variety and abundance of butterfly species was amazing. A myriad of Common Grass Yellows was seen mud-puddling in various spots. Common Jezebel, Great Eggfly, Danaid Eggfly, Common Crow, Crimson and Common Rose, Blue Tiger, Lime Butterfly, Bluebottle, Emigrant, Little Orange Tip, Leopard, etc., were some of the easily recognized species. A Chameleon *Chamaeleon zeylanicus* was spotted upon a Gulmohar *Delonix regia* tree! [Aasheesh Pittie]

FIELD CRAFT

IDENTIFICATION OF *PRINIA* WARBLERS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Aasheesh Pittie with illustrations by Sachin Jaltare

Having for many years used the excuse of a weak memory, for peoples' names, as often as for warbler identification—I decided to set this aberration of my otherwise inculpable character in proper perspective. I discovered, on a recent trip to the A.P. Police Academy, the confusion fellow birders have in identifying species of our resident Prinias. I hope the following notes and illustrations will pump the adrenaline of confidence in all of us when confronted by this merry family of 'Little Brown Jobs' (LBJs in colloquial parlance) on our next field trip! Since warblers are notoriously similar, you can imagine the plight of the artist! In trying to depict warblers accurately through plain line drawings, *he* does a good job, *who* conveys the jizz of the bird properly. The illustrations are *based* on Baker (1997). Good luck with the LBJs!

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF PRINIA WARBLERS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Characters	Rufous Prinia <i>P. rufescens</i>	Franklin's Prinia <i>P. hodgsonii</i>	Rufousfronted Prinia <i>P. buchanani</i>
Field characters	<i>Size:</i> 11-12 cm. <i>Above</i> rufous brown back & tail. Loes & supercilium broad whitish & curves around eye. A pale eye rim. Bill short, horn-brown, generally heavier than Franklin's'. Tail much shorter than <i>P. i.</i> <i>Below</i> pale buff, more ochraceous on flanks & lower belly. <i>Summer:</i> Crown & nape ashy-brown. <i>Winter:</i> Crown & nape concolorous with back.	<i>Size:</i> 11-13 cm. <i>Above</i> Greyish & pale olive-brown including edges of wing. Flanks suffused with cream. Short ashy loes & supercilium. Tail long, grey, tipped with black & white. Thin black bill. <i>Below</i> White. <i>Summer:</i> Grey pectoral band present. <i>Winter:</i> Breast band broken in middle.	<i>Size:</i> 12 cm. <i>Above</i> Forehead & crown rufous. Pale grey ear-coverts. Loes & narrow supercilium whitish. Tail dark brown with white tips (except on central feathers), showing as conspicuous fringe when tail fanned upon bird landing. <i>Below</i> Whitish, tinged with fulvous on flanks & vent. Bill pale horn-brown.
Habitat	More a forest bird than <i>P. hodgsonii</i> . Affects grass under groves of deciduous trees, etc.	A bird of bushes rather than grass, of scrub jungle, open deciduous forest edges mango groves, etc.	Stony semi-desert and arid scrub jungle mixed with coarse grass, etc. Prefers dried biotope than <i>P. hodgsonii</i> .
General Habits	Great skulker.	In flocks (5-20) outside br. Season. More gregarious than <i>P. inornata</i> .	Terrestrial feeder.
Calls	Feeble <i>seep</i> (or <i>sip</i>), <i>seep</i> , <i>seep</i> ... Also cont. mono. <i>Chip</i> , & <i>chip-wee</i> , <i>chip-wee</i> . Song similar to <i>P. hodgsonii</i> but no comparable description available.	Call: <i>zee-zee-zee</i> or <i>pree-dee-dee</i> . Song: <i>chiwee-chiweeichiwi-chip-chip-chip</i> (or <i>yousee-yousee-yousee-which-which-which</i>).	Call: a shrill <i>chirrup</i> . Song: a trill followed by a 3-note <i>sirriget-sirriget-sirriget</i> .
Remarks		Confusable with <i>P. r.</i> and <i>P. i.</i> Differs in having a smaller, much finer bill and different song.	In worn plumage tail tips get abraded and rufous forehead may become faint; tail is darker.
	Plain Prinia <i>Prinia inornata</i>	Jungle Prinia <i>Prinia sylvatica</i>	Ashy Prinia <i>Prinia socialis</i>
Field Characters	<i>Size:</i> 13-14 cm. <i>Winter:</i> <i>Above:</i> Rufescent. Loes, narrow supercilium & sides of head creamy white. Outer tail feathers whitish. Tail long, deeply graduated, rufescent brown with an imperfect subterminal dark bar & pale tip Bill brown with lower yellowish, smaller than Jungle. Mouth black. <i>Below</i> Warm buff. <i>Summer:</i> <i>Above:</i> Dull earthy grey-brown. Tail shorter & less graduated. Subterminal dark bar & pale tip usually absent. Bill black with v. little yellow in lower. Inside fleshy. <i>Below:</i> White with a faint yellowish tinge.	<i>Size:</i> 15 cm. <i>Above</i> Earthy brown. Prominent loes & a narrow supercilium whitish. Tail brown, tipped whitish, (except central feathers) subtipped darker; outermost pair almost entirely white on inner web. Bill black (<i>summer</i>), heavy and thickset. Other stages horny brown with lower mandible fleshy. Mouth of <i>br.</i> Male black. Otherwise pinkish. <i>Below</i> Entirely cream-colour. <i>Juv.</i> Lower mandible bright yellow, gape yellow. Female has horn-brown bill with flesh base to lower mandible.	<i>Size:</i> 13 cm. <i>Summer:</i> Dark grey above with rufous-tinged wings and tail. Mouth black. White supercilium, whitish eye-ring contrasting strongly with dark grey ear coverts and blackish loes. Fine black bill. Under parts rufous, especially on flanks. <i>Winter:</i> Upper parts tinged with rufous.
Habitat	Scrub & boulder country, rank grassland, thorn thickets mixed with high grass, open cultivation with suitable high crops, etc.	Low bush jungle with coarse grass in open, stony country, in plains and hills. Drier than <i>P. i.</i>	Inhabits grasslands, scrub, farmlands, gardens, thorn and deciduous forests in lowlands and foothills.
General Habits	As a rule frequents a less dry facies than typical <i>P. sylvatica</i> & less wet than that of <i>P. socialis</i> .	<i>Br:</i> Male performs a steeply undulating switchback flight display with occasional wing snapping and fanning tail to show off white outer feathers.	Wetter facies than both <i>P. i.</i> and <i>P. sylvatica</i> .
Calls	Notes a rather plaintive <i>tee-tee-tee</i> ; <i>kink</i> , <i>kink</i> Or <i>chi-up</i> rapidly repeated. Alarm note <i>creak</i> , <i>creak</i> , <i>creak</i> . Song: wheezy insectish <i>click-click-click</i>	Call: loud quick-repeated <i>pit</i> , <i>pit</i> , <i>pit</i> , etc. Song: loudly repeated for 2-3 min. <i>pit-pretty</i> , <i>pit-pretty</i> , <i>pit-pretty</i> .	Call: sharp nasal <i>tee</i> , <i>tee</i> , <i>tee</i> . Song: wheezy "jimmy-jimmy-jimmy".
Remarks	Pronounced supercilium buffish.	Largest in size with long tail, heavy, thick bill. Usually lacks supercilium.	From all others by pale rufous under parts.

References:

- Ali, Sálím & S.D. Ripley (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. 2nd edition. Oxford University Press. Delhi.
- Baker, Kevin (1997): Warblers of Europe, Asia and North Africa. Christopher Helm (Publishers) Ltd. A & C Black. London.
- Inskipp, Carol & Tim Inskipp (1985): A Guide to the Birds of Nepal. Croom Helm. London and Sydney.

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH**HYDERABAD DISTRICT****Hyderabad City 9.10**

INDIAN PITTA Procured from bird market, ringed and released¹. CB, another, with brood-patch from market, ringed and released (HJ, HT).

MEDAK DISTRICT**ICRISAT Campus (SQ)**

MONTAGU'S HARRIER 14.9; MARSH HARRIER: 7.9: 2. 14.9: 7; KESTREL 6.10: 1; WATER COCK 22.8: 1 seen, also hrd calling, rice paddies; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 22.8: 1 in rice paddies; GREEN SANDPIPER: 22.8: 1, 28.8: 5 in rice paddies; WOOD SANDPIPER 21,22.8: c. 40 per day; 28.8: c. 20 in rice paddies; RUFF 28.8: 1 in rice paddies; BLACKWINGED STILT 6.10: 5; SANDGROUSE sp? 10-15 overhead; call, a nasal "chur-chur" or "chitur-chitur"; LITTLE BROWN DOVE 10.9: CB, 1 N with 3 eggs; SIRKEER CUCKOO 20.8, 3.9: 1; ASHY SWALLOW SHRIKE 7.9: 7; BAYBACKED SHRIKE 28.9: 14; RUFOUSBACK-ED SHRIKE 28.9; BROWN SHRIKE 28.9: 24; YELLOW-EYED BABBLER 28.8: flock, & 1 singing; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER 10.9: 2 N, 1 with 5 eggs, & 1 under const.; PLAIN WREN WARBLER 10.9: CB, 2 N with 4 eggs and 4 chicks, resp.; ASHY WREN WARBLER 5.9: CB ad., feeding 4 fledglings. 9.9: CB, 3 N with 4 eggs, 5 eggs and 3 chicks resp.; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD 10.9: CB, 1 N with 2 hatchlings; RED MUNIA 5.10: CB, 1 N with 7 eggs; BLACKHEADED MUNIA 23.9: CB, pair in N.

KURNOOL DISTRICT**Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary (KI, SQ, A)**

PAINTED STORK: 25.8: 2; SPOTBILL DUCK: 26.8: PRB, 1 flying with broken eggshell & dropping it. Also several seen; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 25.8: 1 M; GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 17-23.8: entire sanctuary scanned 2 evenings. 9 F, 2 M (1st evening), 5 F, 5 M (2nd); LESSER FLORICAN: 2 M disp.; INDIAN COURSER 24,25.8: c. 50; GREENSHANK 25.8: hrd; COMMON INDIAN NIGHTJAR hrd; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER: 24.8.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT**A.P. Police Academy 6.9 (AP)**

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; IORA CB, 1 M incubating.

Balarpur (Near Midhani) 10.10 (HJ)

COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO CB, 1 chick being fed by Whiteheaded Babbler! WHITEHEADED BABBLER CB, foster parents of Common Hawk-Cuckoo which they were feeding.

Shamirpet Kanchas 11.10 (RM)

JACK SNIPE; MONTAGU'S HARRIER; PALE HARRIER; RED TURTLE-DOVE; SYKES' CRESTED LARK; BLACK REDSTART

GOA**NORTH GOA DISTRICT****Chapora River (Mouth of the) 18.8 (HL)**

HERRING GULL 1 ad.; GREAT BLACKHEADED GULL POB, 4 br., plm; WHITEWINGED BLACK TERN moulting into winter plm; GULLBILLED TERN 6; COMMON TERN 1 ad.; ROSEATE TERN POB, 30+ br., plm; WHITECHEEKED TERN 60+, 80% imm.; LITTLE TERN 6+ non-br., plm; LARGE CRESTED TERN POB, 4 br., plm; LESSER CRESTED TERN 60+; SANDWICH TERN 125+ non-br., plm.

MAHARASHTRA**NASHIK DISTRICT (BR, SG, RG)****Gangapur Dam**

BLACK IBIS 16.8: 24. 1 feeding on a Garden Lizard *Calotis versicolor*; SPOONBILL 27.8: PRB, 2 in br., plm; FLAMINGO 2.8: 150; PAINTED PARTRIDGE 5-18.8: PRB, M singing all around; RAIN QUAIL 30.8: PRB, M singing; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL 30.8: CB, 2 ad., 4 eggs; INDIAN COURSER 12.8: 1 sub-ad.; SYKES' CRESTED LARK 6.8: CB, 2 N. 1 with 2 yng, other with 2 eggs; GREY SHRIKE 8.8: CB, 2 ad., 2 yng. 12.8: 1 feeding on frog (sp.,?); COMMON MYNA 16.8: CB, A pair & 2 yng in N; REDVENTED BULBUL 28.8: CB, 1 pair, 3 yng; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER 12.8: CB, 1 ad., 3 eggs. 14.8: 3 yng. Chick hatching to flt 16 days; PLAIN WREN-WARBLER 24.8: CB, 1 N with 4 eggs. 25.8: CB, 1 N with 1 egg. 27.8: 1 N with 3 eggs. All N in Parthenium weeds!

MUMBAI DISTRICT**Goregaon (IGIDR Campus)**

RED SPURFOWL 16,18.9: Hrd (AP); IORA 18.9: CB. Pair feeding 1 yng (MBK); SPOTTED BABBLER 16,18.9: 3; ASHY PRINIA 16.9: CB: 1 ad., feeding 3 yng (SS).

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Adiseshaiah (A), A Pittie (AP); B Raha (BR); H Lainer (HL); K Isvaran (KI); MB Krishna (MBK); R Gadgil (RG); R Mathew (RM); S Gudsoorkar (SG); S Quader (SQ); S Subramanya (SS);

NOTES:

¹ BNHS ring # AB-147502. Contact BSAP for further details.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

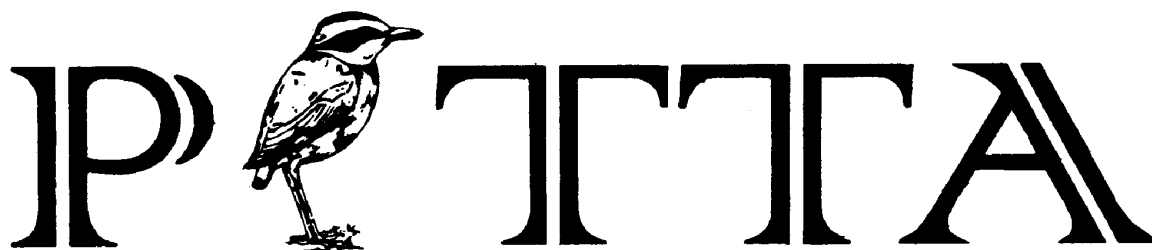
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For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Illustration: page 3 – Varunika Saraf. **Note:** Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's Letter will be resumed next month.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607)

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. **E-mail:** AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN



PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 8-11-1998: Shamirpet Lake: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30 am and assemble at the canteen of the tourist complex. This will be a half day trip.

22-11-1998: Dindi Reservoir, Nalgonda District: Two jeeps of the A.P. Forest Dept., will start from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta, at 7.00 a.m. sharp. This will be a full day trip. Dindi is approximately 90 km from Hyderabad, on the Srisailem road. Flamingos frequent the waters during winter. If time permits, we will also visit the Umamaheshwaram Temple area, which is excellent for birds. Please bring snacks and water.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: 16-11-1998, 6 p.m.: Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004. The Agenda, as per the Notice dated 20-10-1998 and circulated through PITTA No 90, October 1998, will be as follows:

1. Honorary Secretary's Report.
2. Presentation of accounts by Honorary Treasurer.
3. Appointment of Auditors.
4. Change of name of Society.
5. Any other business.

NOTES & NEWS

Bird Conservation Networking Programme

Siraj A. Taher

BirdLife International (BLI)—previously, International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP)—an U.K. based organization, has for the past several years, been working for the conservation of birds and their habitats in over 80 countries. One of their main objectives is to identify and protect Important Bird Areas (IBAs) throughout the world. Inventories of different regions have been published and IBA projects are under way in the Americas, Africa and parts of Asia. The Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB) is involved with BLI as the principal funding agency. The global criteria for identifying IBAs are

1. Identification of globally threatened species
2. Identification of restricted range species in Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs)
3. Characteristic habitats and bird species of the major biomes of the country/region
4. Important sites for congregatory waterbirds, seas-birds and other migratory birds.

BLI is basically a partnership of organizations in different countries, which are working for the conservation of birds and their habitats and, in general, the diversity of all life.

This programme is now being started in India. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has been chosen the BLI National Partner in India. Various NGOs, Societies, agencies involved with bird studies and their conservation all over the country will have to be identified and selected to form a network group in India. Considering the size of the country and the variety of the fauna, flora and habitats, the networking programme in India, with BNHS as the principal partner, will, on a smaller scale, be like the BLI partnership set-up around the world.

An ambitious programme is being envisaged for the BLI-BNHS Network partnership in India, initially, for the next 3 years.

To set this up, a network setup working committee has been formed in September 1998, at Mumbai. This group will be drawing up various criteria for selection of members, network structure, working relations and procedures, funding and fund management role of partners, conservation priorities and monitoring.

Looking at this emerging scenario on the bird conservation front in India, it becomes necessary that our Society (BSAP) takes stock of its objectives and future plans. We have to decide on three things

1. Do we want to join this 'movement'?
2. Should we draw up bird conservation projects for Andhra Pradesh and execute them?
3. Are members willing to put in time and effort towards attaining these objectives?

The opportunity to go forward is available. It is for us to take with complete understanding and consciousness of the commitment it will demand.

Bird Surveys of 'Protected Areas' in the Hyderabad Region

Aasheesh Pittie

The BSAP is commencing a year long project which envisages the survey of selected 'protected areas' within the municipal limits of Hyderabad city and its surrounds. 'Protected areas' connote campuses of institutions, wilderness areas and municipal gardens—all of which have a permanent wall on their circumference, thereby effectively preventing the common means of environmental degradation (grazing, wood-cutting, etc.), from taking place. The primary objective of the survey is to collect data on species diversity between two types of habitats—gardens (regularly maintained) and wilderness areas (devoid of any maintenance). The project commences from 15 November 1998 and is being coordinated by Mr K.C. Ramakrishna [KC], (phone: 3079494-261; E-mail:

ppd@rnd.bhel.co.in), who may be contacted for details. The areas selected are given below, followed by names of participants:

WILDERNESS AREAS

1. Chilkur Deer Park: Rajeev Mathew, Sunil Kumar, Shafaat Ulla.
2. Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park: Aasheesh Pittie, K Bharadwaj, Sushil Kapadia.
3. Shamirpet Deer Park/Hakimpet Airforce Academy: MS Kul-karni, Shafaat Ulla, KC Ramakrishna, JVD Moorthy, Vinay Totawar.
4. University of Hyderabad: Siraj Taher, K Bharadwaj, Balaram.
5. Mahavir Harin Vanasthali: Y Malini, Siraj Taher.

PARKS

1. Indira Park : Humayun Taher, G Plumber.
2. Sanjivayya Park: Humayun Taher, G Plumber.
3. Nehru Zoo Park: KC Ramakrishna, Humayun Taher.

Members desiring to join the project should contact KC for details. The surveys are simple in design. Frequency of visits to areas is once every fortnight (can be rotated between members of a group). *Members are urged to participate and make the project a success.*

Great Indian Bustards *Ardeotis nigriceps* and Lesser Florican *Syphotides indica*, those beleaguered members of the Otididae, have been 'discovered' in a new area. Mr. Bishwarup Raha, (Hon. Wildlife Warden, Nashik District), a regular contributor to the column *Birding Notes* in *Pitta*, reports the sighting of GIBs and floricans in the 5,000 acre campus of the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited factory in Nashik District, Maharashtra. According to Mr. P. Kale of the Air Traffic Control, bustards have been 'residing in the premises' since 1974! A male florican was observed displaying. Further details in *Birding Notes*. There may be many more such

enclosed and protected areas in the country, which bustards visit. Organizations like the Bombay Natural History Society, involved in the study of these birds, should inventory such establishments and publicize the importance of the bustard family, to the people there. Who knows, what may turn up!

Literary Wrenditions

"Bluebirds pay their box rent with notes more liquid than Treasury bills." [Anderson, O. (1998): Of woods and weeds. *Birdwatcher's Digest* 20(6): 80-82].

Garrulax Corner: Yeh Kya Kea!

"I've heard it said that owning a normal pet parrot is like having a two-year-old child with a can opener on its face. If that is so, then a flock of wild keas is like a gang of teenagers with chain saws on their faces. ... Once while visiting a little-used parking lot at a high elevation in the Fjordland area of southern New Zealand, I noticed a family that had just come back to find that their car had been vandalized. The windshield wipers were bent askew, with the softer parts ripped away, and most of the rubber molding had been pulled away from the edges of the windows. After assessing the damage, and cursing the likely culprits, the head of the family climbed into the car and slammed the door—and the windshield fell out onto the hood. With the glass tossed into the trunk, the family drove away, curses still emanating from the driver's seat. Meanwhile, down at the far end of the parking lot, three keas were studiously working on another car." [Kenn Kaufman (1998): Parking lot birds. *Birdwatcher's Digest* 20(6): 16-22. (Editors' Note: For more on the kea, see *Pitta* # 75, July 1997.)].

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—19

"My very first contact with the Society, then housed in the premises occupied by Phipsons... was a thrilling experience and is still fresh in my memory.

"Incidentally this building at the corner of Forbes Street and Apollo Street was the former residence of the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court. In those days there was practically no social contact between English people and Indian, much less so for boys of my age...

"I remember the feeling of nervousness—almost of fear and trembling—at the prospect of meeting a full-grown sahib face to face with which I entered the quaint old single-storeyed building through its magnificent solid teakwood portal...

"This must have been somewhere in 1908, and my first contact with the BNHS was later to become such an important element in the shaping of my life and career. All my nervousness vanished completely in the face of the charming kindness and consideration of Mr Millard ... As Mr Millard peered at me over his reading glasses I fumbled out my credentials and the little paper packet containing the mysterious bird. He identified it at a glance as a Yellowthroated Sparrow (*Petronia xanthocollis*) and bid me to follow him to the reference cabinets, from one of which he produced several stuffed specimens for confirmation ... He patiently opened drawer after drawer for me to see the hundreds of different birds found in the Indian Empire, and I believe it was at this moment that my curiosity about birds really clicked. Mr Millard gave me a few bird books from the small library to read, and this is how I made my first acquaintance with Edward Hamilton Aitken's (EHA's) inimitable classics—*Common Birds of Bombay* and, *A Naturalist on the Prowl*. They spurred my interest, and I have since read them again and again over the last sixty years or more with undiminished pleasure and admiration.

"I find that I have missed out much of the latter-day story of the BNHS, with which I have been so closely associated, particularly since my repatriation from Burma in 1924, and more particularly since India's independence. It has been a period of great intellectual gratification for me personally, and also, I like to feel, of considerable significance in the progress of the Society and the proper projection of its image within the country and abroad.

"...this has been a source of great satisfaction to me, since the Society is now capable of producing adequately trained field biologists of a calibre otherwise difficult to find in India." [Sálim Ali, 1985, *The Fall of a Sparrow*, pp. 6-7, 166-167]

On the 15th of September, the Bombay Natural History Society completed 115 years of its founding, on that date in 1883, by eight residents of Bombay (*Mumbai* in native tongue), who met in the then Victoria and Albert Museum and "constituted themselves as the Bombay Natural History Society. They proposed to meet monthly and exchange notes, exhibit interesting specimens and otherwise encourage each other." According to E.H. Aitken (the first Honorary Secretary, September 1883-March 1886), Dr G.A. Maconochie was the '*fons et origo*' of the Society and besides these two gentlemen, the other founders were Mr J.C. Anderson, Dr Sakaram Arjun, Mr J. Johnston, Dr D. MacDonald, Dr Atmaram Pandurang, and Col. C. Swinhoe. Away on leave in England, at that momentous occasion for Natural History in the Indian sub-continent, Mr H.M. Phipson (second Honorary Secretary, 1886-1906) could be considered as the 9th Founder, joining the Society "very soon afterwards" and making a room in his office, at 18 Forbes Street, available to it. Though the B.N.H.S. was the handiwork, in the main, of the British Raj (and the patronage of some Indian Princely States), after Independence it was largely the presence and

personality of Dr Sálím Ali which helped sustain it hence. From 236 members (only 15 Indian) enrolled at the time the inaugural number of its *Journal* was published in January 1886, there were 1862 Ordinary, 1474 Life, and 496 Student members (3,832 in all) from India, plus 46 Ordinary and 207 Life members from abroad (253 total), besides 111 Compound Corporate and 95 Institutional members, in 1995-1996 (see *J.B.N.H.S.*, 95: 155; 1998). This 4,000+ Individual and 200+ Institutional membership list pales into insignificance when compared to *double* these numbers in even a special-subject Society like the Entomological Society of America (ESA), which had over 7,500 individual members over a decade ago. The B.N.H.S. is a centurian Society well worth joining by naturalists, of any kind, and a 10,000 strong membership is what it should aim at achieving now, 50 years after Independence.

Accounts of the history of the B.N.H.S., and of its magnificent *Journal*, are available in the references given at the end of this Letter. I will not therefore go into any further detail, except to highlight and comment on a few points that I think a little attention. For "Outstationers" like myself, about the only Life membership benefit I accrue comes from the Society's *Journal*. Its latest issue, Vol. 95 (1) of April 1998, is the 340th number published and contains 191 pages. Volume 94 of 1997 consisted of 602 pages, compared to the 234 pages of Volume 1 of 1886, the inaugural number 1 (1) comprising of only 30 pages and edited by EHA. The *Journal* is still interesting, perhaps to a professional like myself, but I feel most of its current contents are "Latin & Greek" to many of the present, amateur and scientifically untrained, members. The 'style' of more popular articles and notes, of what Sálím Ali (and I!) considered the best period of the *Journal* (Vols 27-35, 1920-1932), needs to be resuscitated, if outstation members are going to seriously think of joining and subscribing. The 'popular', colourful, *Hornbill*, begun in 1976, is now 85 issues old, with its "1998(1)" number [citing this magazine is an awkward job; cannot 1998(2) be called # 86 and subsequent issues numbered consecutively, with each issue having separate pagination, stating page 1?]. Yes, this publication has potential, but better *writing* needs to be 'prospected' for, to supplement the beautiful illustrations.

The General Index to the *Journal* is available only for Volumes 1-63. It is a pity that the Editors after 1967 (P.V. Bole, J.C. Daniel, Z. Futehally, A.N.D. Nanavati, H. Santapau, *et al.*) haven't kept up this periodically 'engineered' facility, useful to readers. In the 1950s "Catalogues" of the Books in the B.N.H.S. Library, by taxa (Groups), had appeared. It would be very convenient if lists of the library's holdings *as of now* (including periodicals/journals available) are published in future issues. The Librarian should prepare such catalogues and bibliographies, using the literature storehouse available to him/her, almost every day! The covers of the *Journal* have changed periodically, but there is absolutely no doubt, that this *Journal* perhaps holds the largest database on Indian natural History anywhere in the World, and needs support, both financial and, more importantly, from authors who *can write* (also, some Editorial finesse too!). the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, begun in Calcutta in 1832 (incorporating J.D. Herbert's *Gleanings in Science*, 1829-1831), was the first major Indian scientific periodical carrying Natural History articles of great interest. But, it was the *Calcutta Journal of Natural History* (1840-1848) which was the first I India on this special-subject, and *not* the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, as is widely presumed. In those pioneering days, the *Asian* newspaper, and the *Oriental* (and *Bengal*) *Sporting Magazine*, also carried much writing on our wildlife, even if largely on *shikar*!

As I pen this 19th Letter for *Pitta*, the postman has delivered a circular from J.C. Daniel, the present Honorary Secretary of the B.N.H.S. It carries a query about a new "activity", which is, I think, long overdue. Branches of the B.N.H.S., in other parts of the country, should have sprung up in these last 115 years, and Daniel's suggested activity has my total, enthusiastic support. Hopefully, at least regional research stations, which could act as "a Millard to a young Sálím Ali", will blossom, through motivated members' interest and time. Rudyard Kipling, as well as Mark Twain, were visitors to the Society building once, but it is *the rank and file* of this unique Society, which celebrated its birthday last month, that have been its most valuable resource. However, I do with the B.N.H.S. is going to remain a Society of *Natural History*, *as well as* of "Conservation," or whatever is implied by this latest 'catchword'.

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BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills (AP)

INDIAN PITTA 16.10: hrd; GREY DRONGO 16.10: 8-10;
HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 2.11: 1.

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park 2.10 (SU, SAT)

DABCHICK CB, 3 pairs with 2 yng each; SPOTBILL DUCK CB, 1 pair, 11 ducklings; PEA FOWL CB, 1 F with 4 yng; STONE CURLEW CB, 2 ad., 2 yng; KOEL CB, 3 yng 1 being fed by house crow; INDIAN PITTA 9.10: 1 procured from bird market, ringed & released [BNHS "AB"-147501] (HJ, HT); ROSY PASTOR 8;

HOUSE CROW CB, *see* 'koel'; BLACK-HEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 1 M; SHIKRA CB, 1 imm. PARADISE FLYCATCHER 19.10: 1 F (SU).

MEDAK DISTRICT

Bollarum 29.10 (HT)
PALLID HARRIER 1 M.

RANGAREDDY DISTRICT

Himayat Sagar 22.10 (HJ, HaJ, HT)
KESTREL 1 ad., F trapped, ringed & released [BNHS "C"-56005].
Mamidipally 22.10 (HJ, HaJ, HT)
KESTREL 1 ad., F trapped, ringed & released [BNHS "C"-56006].
Nadargul 20.10 (HJ & HaJ)
KESTREL 1 1st year juv., F trapped, ringed & released [BNHS "C"-56004].
Osman Sagar 22.10 (HY)
LARGE CORMORANT; SHOVELLER M in eclipse plm; COOT CB, birds in all stages of plm; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 27.10: 1 (AP); BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 2.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Banashankari
GREY WAGTAIL 18.9 (JNP).
Bannerghatta National Park 30.8 (SK, JNP)
WIRETAILED SWALLOW 7; BLACKHEADED MUNIA PRB, carrying grass blade; BAYA CB, 6 N (3 completed and 3 under const.; 1 M disp.).
Basavanagudi (MBK)
GREY WAGTAIL 3.9; Greenish Leaf Warbler 4.9, hrd from 12.9.
Byrasandra 11.9 (SS)
BARN OWL 2 sighted/hrd for past 1 week in an apartment. Establishing territory?
Cunningham Road
GREY DRONGO 5.9 (JNP).
Gandhi Krishi Vignana Kendra campus 26.9 (SS)
CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD feeding on *Apis florea* bees from their hive, 2 m. above ground in dense *Erythroxylon monogynum* bush; INDIAN ROLLER 2, chasing each other; RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE 3, seen after many years; BROWN SHRIKE 3, arrived 23.9, started calling 26.9; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB, N, incubating; INDIAN WREN WARBLER PRB, ad., with N-mat.
Hebbal Tank
COMMON SWALLOW 15.9 (JNP).

Jnana Bharati: Bangalore University Campus

27.9 (JNP,MBK, AA, JJ, NA, UR)
COMMON HAWK CUCKOO hrd; BROWN SHRIKE imm;
JUNGLE MYNA CB, 2 imm; GREY WAGTAIL; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, N const., in Social spiders' *Stegodyphus* sp. colony; BAYA CB, 4 N under const., 3 disp.

KOLAR DISTRICT

Gudibunda 18.8 (SK)
SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, with N-mat.

MAHARASHTRA

NASHIK DISTRICT (BR)

Gangapur Dam
BLACKEARED KITE 19.9: 8; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 10.9: 3; REDHEADED MERLIN 16.9: 2; KESTREL 6.9: 2; COMMON BUSTARD QUAIL 14.9: CB, 1 F incubating 4 eggs; COMMON SANDPIPER 2.9: 8; INDIAN CUCKOO 16.9: 4; EUROPEAN ROLLER 16.9: 3; ROSY PASTOR 4.9: 11; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB, 1 ad., 4 yng; PLAIN PRINIA 1.9: CB, 1 ad., 2 eggs; BAYA 16.9: CB, 1 ad., 3 eggs; WHITETHROATED MUNIA 10.9: CB, 2 ad., 4 eggs; RED MUNIA 10.9: PRB, N under const.
Ozar (H.A.L. Factory)
GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 24.9: 1 M. 25.9: 3; LESSER FLORICAN 2.9: PRB, M disp. 24.9: M disp. 25.9: M disp.

MUMBAI DISTRICT

Goregaon (IGIDR Campus)
RED SPURFOWL 16,18.9: Hrd (AP); IORA 18.9: CB. Pair feeding 1 yng (MBK); SPOTTED BABBLER 16,18.9: 3; ASHY PRINIA 16.9: CB: 1 ad., feeding 3 yng (SS).

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.
CONTRIBUTORS: A Andheria (AA); A Pittie (AP); H Jafar (HJ); H Jafer (HaJ); H Taher (HT); H Tyabji (HY); J Joseph (JJ); JN Prasad (JNP); MB Krishna (MBK); N Akash (NA); SA Taher (SAT); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Ullah (SU); U Ramaiah (UR).
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

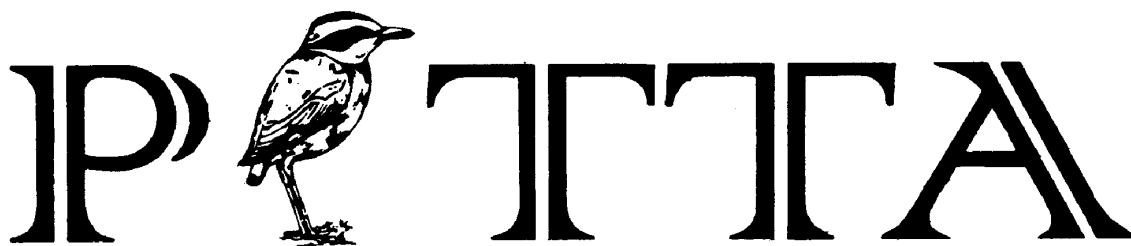
Birdwatchers at Shamirpet Lake. Illustration by Srikant Kolhe.

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000, Bank charges=25 for outstation cheques & demand drafts.



PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 6-12-1998: Ibrahimpatnam Tank, Nagarjunasagar Road: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30 am and assemble at the beginning of the bund. This will be a half-day trip. APSRTC bus route # 277 from Women's College, Koti and Imliban Bus Depot terminates at Ibrahimpatnam village, but will stop on request on the bund.

27-12-1998: Bibinagar Tank, Warangal Highway, Nalgonda District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30 am. We meet at the first railway crossing after Ghatkesar, on the main road. This will be a half-day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 21-12-1998, 6 p.m.: "A safari to Kenya" talk by Sri S Ashok Kumar, Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Vulture Alert

Asad R. Rahmani, Director, B.N.H.S.

Eight species of **vultures** are reported from the Indian subcontinent, out of which the following four species were quite common on the Indian plains: White-backed, Long-billed, Indian Griffon and Egyptian, particularly in north, northwest and central India. Only the King Vulture is considered uncommon. The Himalayan Griffon and Lammergeier are montane species found in the Himalayas. The last species, Cinereous Vulture, is widely distributed in central Asia but in India it is mainly a winter visitor to the north and north-west (as far as Dhulia district in Maharashtra). Vultures are generally less abundant in the south Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

There has been a decrease in vulture numbers in several Asian countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, due to direct persecution and a decline in their natural prey. In these countries there is no taboo against eating cows and buffaloes so few carcasses are left. In India, however, the situation is different and we have millions of cows and buffaloes. So there is no dearth of carcasses. Vultures therefore receive an uninterrupted supply of food throughout the year.

In recent years we have received alarming reports that vultures are declining rapidly all over their former strongholds in northern India. There have been many news items in local newspapers that carcasses are being left uneaten because of the scarcity of vultures. Carcasses, which used to be consumed within minutes, now rot for days and in many areas only the village dogs are left to scavenge on them.

It is difficult to quantify the overall decline in vulture numbers because no baseline data on an all-India basis are available. However, some idea of the population crash can be made from the studies of Dr Vibhu Prakash, Principal Scientist of the Bombay Natural History Society. In the mid 1980s, whilst carrying out Ph.D. research on the birds of prey in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, he counted around 350 nests of White-backed Vultures inside the Park. However in 1997 he saw only 25 nests - more than 90% decline in ten years, and this year (1998) only 11 nest could be counted inside the Park.

We can only speculate as to the rate of decline in other areas. We also do not know the decline in the populations of Griffon, Long-billed and Egyptian Vultures because no studies have been conducted on their nesting sites or in their foraging areas.

Without proper studies it is difficult to determine the main reason(s) for the decline in vulture numbers. Habitat destruction or hunting, the usual reasons for major population crashes, can both be ruled

out in this case. Large trees, used for nesting by White-backed Vultures (Long-billed and Egyptian vultures normally nest on cliff ledges), are still plentiful in the countryside. Vultures are also not hunted as few people eat them, as they are considered unclean. With a huge number of unproductive livestock, food is not in short supply.

We do not know the reasons for the population crash of White-backed Vultures. We suspect that new pesticides could be responsible for them. But which pesticide(s)? There are some reports of vultures dying after eating cattle carcasses but these are unverified. Perhaps, they are experiencing nesting failures because of eggshell thinning. These were known to be the causes of the population crashes of the Peregrine Falcon in Europe and North America and the Brown Pelican in North America during the 1960s. Alternatively, it could be some avian disease, which is killing the vultures. If this is the case, we will have to wait for the epidemic to subside, leaving a few healthy birds to repopulate the countryside. Another possible reason is that abnormally high populations of vultures have been maintained in India due to the abundant food supply (of cow carcasses). Now, because of liberalization of the Indian economy and other market forces, villagers are keeping fewer cattle, resulting in a decrease in food supplies and the population of vultures is currently stabilizing. It is certainly true that in many areas villagers are shifting to keeping high quality breeds of cattle, which are well looked after and do not die and rot in the countryside. However, it is doubtful if this trend is widespread, especially in the so-called cow-belt consisting of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat where the largest numbers of vultures are (were) found.

Perhaps there is no single factor for the decline of vultures in India. Until we are able to solve the mystery of vulture deaths, we may not be in a position to devise conservation measures to save these majestic and useful birds.

Through this small note I would like to alert you about the decline of vultures. I request you to keep a watch on vultures (and other birds) in your area and if you have noticed a decline in their numbers, please let me know the exact area, period of observation, if possible percentage of decline, and any other useful information.

Practitioners of the oldest profession have been found at work on the icy shores of Antarctica plying their trade in a dress of black and white feathers - they are penguins!

The first recorded examples of such behaviour have been observed in colonies of **Adelie penguins** on Ross Island, about 800 miles from the South Pole, by Dr Fiona Hunter of Cambridge Univer-

sity and Dr Lloyd Davis of the University of Otago, supported by the New Zealand Antarctic Program.

They observed how male Adelies pay for sexual favors with rocks and stones, a limited resource that can prove crucial for the survival of broods. In no other bird have such extra-marital exchanges been recorded, said Dr Hunter, a post-doctoral researcher who has made annual visits to Antarctica to study their sex life.

She described how, at the start of the breeding season, the penguins hunt for stones. Once all the loose rocks have been collected, they attempt to peck them out of the frozen mud to construct a nest platform, crucial to keep eggs high and dry above mud and chilly melt water.

Stones are so valuable that they will steal them from each other, though they risk being attacked by the owners of the hard currency. In the journal Auk, Drs Hunter and Davis describe how females have developed another strategy: they lure nearby male penguins for copulation in exchange for the rocks. "Females have figured out that one way to steal the stones without being attacked is to swap copulation for them," said Dr Hunter.

They slip away from their partner and wander over to the nest of an unpaired male. Standard courtship follows, with a dip of the head and a coy look from the corner of her eye. If he shows interest, she will lie prone which, in the language of penguin love, is an invitation to mate or carry out what the scientists call "extra-pair copulation".

Once mating is over, the female picks up a stone, and carries it to her nesting platform! Sometimes males permit females to return for a second free stone. Other females found that a little courtship was enough to persuade a male to allow them to play with a rock, then cart it away. One especially teasing female managed to collect 62 stones this way, said Dr Hunter. "The males were probably duped into thinking that she was a possible partner."

Zoologists are now analyzing the benefits of this penguin behaviour. While the male may lose some of his rocks, he gains the possibility of fathering extra chicks. The benefits to the females are less clear. "I don't think that she is just after his stones," said Dr Hunter. "Perhaps the female mates with an extra male for another reason, say to increase the quality or genetic variability of her offspring. This seems reasonable given that not all males actually father the chicks they help to rear."

Another reason for seeking male company could be to form a relationship with a potential mate for the next season if her partner dies. The team is now planning another trip to the frozen continent to uncover more details of the penguin's complicated love life.

[Contributed by Dr S. Subramanya]

Penguins use their bodies and feathers to cover up their feet, when they're exposed to sub-freezing air for extended periods.

An equally important question is how do **waterbirds** keep from losing too much heat through their exposed feet when they are swimming. To combat what would be a considerable drain on their body temperature and energy reserves, a very effective heat-conservation system was evolved. It works on the same principle as a heat pump does in keeping a house warm, using a heat-exchange process. In the birds' feet and legs, the arteries that carry blood from the heart have thin walls and are aligned right next to the veins bringing the blood back. As the warm arterial blood flows down to the feet, most of its extra heat passes over into the cold venous blood, neutralizing the temperature and minimizing the energy loss. Obviously, the feet are able to function, even when very cold and suffer no damage. The feet of waterfowl are so insensitive to the cold that, occasionally whole flocks of ducks and geese are trapped when their feet have frozen tight to the ice during the night. When you see a bird standing on one leg in cold weather, that is done to cut the heat-loss due to foot exposure in half. [Steve McDonald, Eugene, Oregon, Newsgroups: rec.birds]

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

"This was my first **peregrine**. I have seen many since then, but none has excelled it for speed and fire of spirit. For ten years I spent all my winter searching for that restless brilliance, for the sudden passion and violence that peregrines flush from the sky. For ten years I have been looking upward for that cloud-biting anchor shape, that cross-bow flinging through the air. The eye becomes insatiable for hawks. It clicks towards them with ecstatic fury, just as the hawk's eye swings and dilates to the luring food-shapes of gulls and pigeons ... I shall try to make plain the bloodiness of killing. Too often this has been slurred over by those who defend hawks. Fleshing eating man is in no way superior. It is so easy to love the dead. The word 'predator' is baggy with misuse. All birds eat living flesh at some time in their lives. Consider the cold-eyed thrush, that springy carnivore of lawns, worm stabber, basher to death of snails. We should not sentimentalise his song and forget the killing that sustains it."

[Baker, John A. (1967): The Peregrine.]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—20

"Objections have been raised against employment of Latin names for plants. Efforts have been made to develop an English nomenclature based on the use of English rather than Latin names ... There are many basic problems that confront the advocate of a system comprised only of English names, or of names based on any spoken nationalistic tongue. In the first place, it is difficult to ascertain which of several English names for a given plant may have been employed first, and secondly, these names by themselves are of little use in identification, inasmuch as there are no treatments of the world flora based on them..."

"The use of scientific names, rather than of common or vernacular names, has much to commend it. Scientific names do indicate generic and usually, genetic relationships; hence they are of biological significance. They are international in scope and are common to all tongues, and they are relatively unambiguous. It has been said that scientific names are difficult to pronounce and to remember, that because they are polysyllabic they are confusing, and that to the non-Latinist they are without meaning. The puerility of such contentions becomes apparent when one listens to youth conversing freely about superheterodynes, polyclinal cleavages, and television, or the modern mother and housewife discussing riboflavin, schizophrenia, conjunctivitis, or even paradichlorobenzene." [G.H.M. Lawrence, 1951, *Taxonomy of Vascular Plants*, pp. 193-194]

"Vernacular names for animals and plants exist in all languages. A primitive tribe of Papuans in the mountains of northwestern New Guinea has 137 different names for the 138 species of local birds. Hunting peoples usually have a better knowledge of nature and consequently a richer taxonomic nomenclature than agricultural or particularly urban peoples. The more conspicuous species of mammals, birds, fishes, and insects have names in all the languages in Europe. In English many of our so-called "common names" are of Anglo-Saxon origin..." [E. Mayr, 1969, *Principles of Systematic Zoology*, p. 342]

What's in a name? In the biological sciences, correct, unambiguous names can be crucial to identities of animal and plant species and to references about them and their lives. Ever since the Swedish "Father of Nomenclature", Carl von Linné (Carolus Linnaeus in Latin), devised a virtually foolproof system that made his *binomens* (denoting genus and species) intelligible to scientists and other conversant with scientific nomenclature, taxonomists like myself have been able to work within this clever system and use it with relatively unambiguous ease, describing and revising species and arranging them in a hierarchical fashion comprising genera, families, orders and classes, etc.

Linnaeus—he signed his works with this latinized form hence taxonomists use it and *not* Linné—published his *Species plantarum* in 1753 and his *Systema naturae* in 1758, giving binomens to plant and animal taxa which he described, originally, in these two genesis works. All plant

and animal binomens (two word names) date from these masterpieces. Publications earlier than these 'do not count' for names. For the two-and-a-half centuries that have gone by, Linnaeus' name-giving scheme has performed adequately, giving taxonomists (and others) little trouble and a relatively easy-to-use international standard system of discovering, describing and 'christening' the world's animal and plant diversity. The *International Rules of Botanical Nomenclature* and the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* now provide guidelines to taxonomists and serve to make the working of these authorized scientific names more and more efficient and error-free every time a new edition is amended and approved by the special Congresses that are held from time to time.

But, as R.E. Blackwelder (1967, *Taxonomy: A Text and Reference Book*, p. 393) had put it, "Nothing that man can do is likely to prevent other men from acting in such a way as to produce problems"! I believe that the 'legitimization' of the subspecies category by the introduction of trinomial names, and the desire to 'standardize' what are called common names, have been major stumbling blocks in the further refined evolution of the names we give plants and animals and then use them to obtain access to data about them or interact with other persons working on them. The quotations reproduced above pinpoint problems, with some precision, I think, but the employment of subspecific names in the nomenclature has muddled, rather than cleared, the actual identities of many presently so-called 'polytypic' species (with 2 or more 'subspecies'). Blackwelder's thoughtfully framed question—"Are the segregates called subspecies actually of the same nature as the taxa of species level and above? If this question cannot be answered in the affirmative, there will be serious doubt as to the relevance of subspecies in taxonomy."

There is still *much work required* to be done on the taxonomy and correct binomial nomenclature of the bird species that live and nest in our sub-continent or fly here in the winter months, chiefly, to find food to survive before migrating back to their homes. While preparing AN UPDATED CHECKLIST OF INDIAN ORNITHOLOGY, which should be published later this month in my *Humea, Field Ornithology* # 6, I have had reason to doubt the species vs. subspecies status of several of our bird taxa. Even correct generic re-assignments of many species seem to be required. After Blyth, Jerdon, Hume and their early associates, then through Whistler and Ticehurst to Biswas, Ripley and Abdulali, field collecting and observation of this sub-continent's birds, from a *taxonomist's* viewpoint, has ground to a halt. Abdulali's (1968-1996) *Catalogue of the birds of the B.N.H.S. collection* gives ample evidence of the lack of additional data to be able to arrive at sufficiently firm conclusions on the status of a considerable number of 'Indian' birds known only by a few skins and whose nidification (breeding biology) is unknown [see also Abdulali, *Hornbill* # 41, 1987(1), pp. 37-40]. Though some revisionary work has been carried out by foreign ornithologists on the systematics of some of our genera and higher taxa, these have been few-and-far-between.

In this murky scenario, contemporary bird watchers and 'ornithologists', both Indian and foreign, are 'stirring up the dirt'. Professionals are grabbing at DNA strands (and little else!) and 'playing cards' with classification and phylogeny, while amateurs are busy 'fishing' for the names game, like star-struck commoners. From a studied familiarity with classical languages we are now being conditioned to native slang, through what I believe is a juvenile, populist, unworthy exercise. The note by T.R. Livesey (1939, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 41: 426-429), then based at Taunggyi in Burma, and the comment on this quite unlettered diatribe by Stuart Baker (41: 429-433) will serve, admirably, to prove my point.

In a future Letter I will explain and demonstrate how use of scientific names (by all, except illiterate bird watchers!) is infinitely superior, in every way, to any standardized common name system that is 'democratically' (!) devised through consultation and discussion. "Truth is not discussed", someone had said, he couldn't have been more explicit!

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560084 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT

Rajahmundry 12.10 (SS)

BARN OWL 1 on telegraph pole in railway station!

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills (AP)

BROWN SHRIKE 3.11: 1; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 3.11: 1.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Kosagi 20.9 (SS)

REDHEADED MERLIN 1 flying over an open scrub area.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (CTH, RG)

DABCHICK 6.9: CB; LARGE CORMORANT 1,30.8. 6.9. 19.10. 1.11: CB, N, ad., imm.; GREY HERON 6.9: CB; OPENBILLED STORK 6.9: 15; SHOVELLER 1.10: 4; SHIKRA 30.8: CB, imm.; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 19.10; MARSH HARRIER 19.10; KESTREL 19.10: 1; GREY PARTRIDGE 6.9: CB, imm; PEA-FOWL 19.10: CB, yng; COOT 1.11: CB, imm.; REDWATTLED LAPWING 30.8: CB, ad., imm.; COMMON SANDPIPER 19.10; RUFF 19.10: 1; BROWN SHRIKE 19.10; BLACK DRONGO 30.8: CB: ad., imm; HOUSE CROW 1.8: CB, N in large cormorant heronry; PLAIN PRINIA 23.8: CB, imm; STONECHAT 19.10;

BAYA 1.8-6.9: CB, N, imm; BLACKTHROATED WEAVER 1.8-6.9: CB, N, imm; SPOTTED MUNIA 8.8: CB.

Narsapur Reserve Forest (CHT, RG, AP)

PYGMY WOODPECKER 23.8, 25.10; BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER 25.10: 1; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO 23.8, 25.10; COMMON WOOD-SHRIKE 23.8; GOLDMANTLED CHLOROPSIS 25.10; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 25.10; GREY TIT 25.10.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Shamirpet Lake 8.11 (AP)

BLACK IBIS 3; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1 M; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING CB, 1 imm; SPOTTED SANDPIPER 1; COMMON SWALLOW 3; IORA CB, 2 ad., 2 yng; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 1; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1 M.

SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT 16.10 (SS)

Dusi

BLACK DRONGO 20 in a stretch of 1 km.

Palem

CATTLE EGRET 800+ foraging in a paddy field.

VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Ponneri 16.10 (SS)

BLACKWINGED STILT 200+ feeding in a paddy field.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)

Anjuna (Seabird Watch)

CRAB PLOVER 18.10: 1 migrating north c. 200m offshore; INDIAN SKIMMER 28.9: 1 migrating north c. 200m offshore; SOOTY TERN 28.9: 6 juv.

Mandovi River (Inland estuary of)

BROADBILLED SANDPIPER 27.9: 12; GREAT STONE PLOVER 8.10: 2, new record for Goa; COLLARED PRATINCOLE 27.9: CB, 13 ad., 1 imm.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary 13.10

EUROPEAN ROLLER* 2; BAYBACKED SHRIKE 1 imm., new record for Goa.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore City

BLUE ROCK THRUSH 26.10: 1 M (SK).

Bannerghatta National Park 17.10 (SK)

SMALL GREEN BARBET PRB, drilling a hole in Syzgium tree about 20' above ground.

Malleshwaram

HOUSE SPARROW 4.11: CB, incubating (?) in a well c. 6m below ground (JNP).

Gandhi Krishi Vignana Kendra Campus (SS)

WRYNECK 4.11: 1, new record for Bangalore; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 4.11: 5 feeding on Eucalyptus nectar; BROWN FLYCATCHER 8.10: 1; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 4.11: Hrd.

MANDYA DISTRICT

Kokkre Bellur Pelicanry 1.11 (SS)

GREY PELICAN 100+ CB, 27 N under const.

Thailur Tank and environs 1.11 (SS)

GARGANEY; ROLLER 5. PRB, a pair courting.

GULBARGA DISTRICT

Lingeria 20.9 (SS)

Grey Shrike 4.

TAMIL NADU

CHENGALPATTU MGR DISTRICT 17.10 (SS)

Ennore Creek

RUFF 50+; BLACKWINGED STILT 20+ feeding in salt pans.

Thiruvattuvar

Cattle Egrets 100+ (SS).

NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT 12.10 (SS)

Mallanur Hills

YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 2.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (AP); CT Hash, (CTH); H Lainer (HL); JN Prasad (JNP); R Grasser (RG); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Subramanya (SS).

NOTES: * "India's southern-most record but for J. Davidson's 1893 near Karwar, Uttar Kanara, Karnataka" (HL).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

CORRESPONDENCE

"In Mumbai you had, in passing, asked me what I thought of BIRDING NOTES. Frankly paving the sketchy information from the peninsula seems quite meaningless to me. Instead, regular notes from important locations of Andhra might be more worthwhile though even this area is very large.

"A year ago, I had traveled to Chennai by the Navjivan Express and I saw a large swathe of Andhra's coastal plain and Delta region. I was horrified to see the infestation by *Proposis chilensis*. You all should really take this matter up seriously. I am sure the rural communities are as exasperated with the weed as ours are.

"As regards the *Prinias*, 'shabaash'. The Ashy Prinia also snaps its wings, though not in aerial display. Franklin's has to my observation got the shortest tail. The call is more 'chattering'. The nests are different as indicated overleaf [below]. Also, birdwatchers should train their ears to the calls—most easy to identify as the sounds are very specific and distinct."

<i>Prinia socialis</i>	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>	<i>Prinia buchanani</i>
Tailorbird type. Also a purse of fibres. Placed in monsoon vegetation, hedges, and shrubs like Tailorbird.	Similar to <i>socialis</i> . Placed in broad-leaved rank, monsoon vegetation.	Purse in <i>sorghum</i> , among reeds.	Tall grass. Deep purse of loosely woven fibres.	Compact ball with side entrance low near ground under thorn scrub.

—Lavkumar Khacher

[Editors' Note: Suggestions to tackle problems of *Prosopis chilensis* and Parthenium, are welcome.]

"Your FIELD CRAFT piece on our Wren-Warblers (not 'Prinias' please!) was a good attempt but must have bewildered most readers as it did me! ... The empty 'Remarks' window under *Prinia rufescens* could have been entered with "occurs only north of the Godavari on the Vizag ghats."

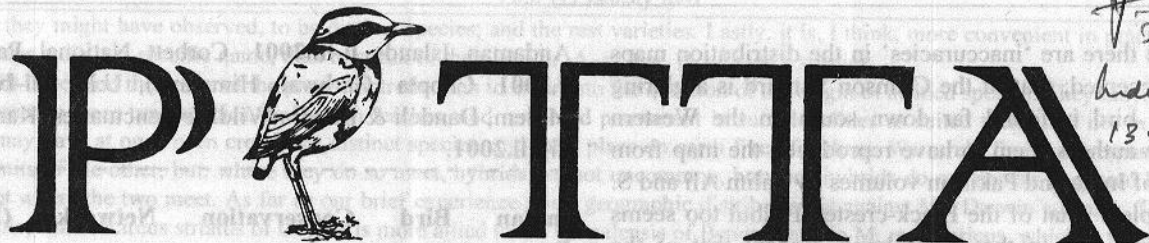
—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Payment by: Cash, M.O., or D.D. only. Cheques not accepted.



20/1/2001
hds
13.2.2001

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 117: January 2001

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Seats may be available in volunteering members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098), Aasheesh (3350683) or, Siraj (6612608).

Saturday, 28-i-2001: ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru, Medak District: Members proceeding directly are requested to reach the destination by 7.30am and assemble at the main gate. Transportation within the campus will be arranged. Please carry snacks and water. This will be a half-day trip. *BSAP T-shirts and caps will be on sale.*

INDOOR MEETING: 25-i-2001, 6 p.m.: Talk and slide show by Dr Rhys E. Green, R.S.P.B. Principal Research Biologist and Senior Research Fellow, Dept., of Zoology, University of Cambridge, U.K., on Field methods for the study of nocturnal cursorial birds. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004. *BSAP T-shirts and caps will be on sale.*

NOTES & NEWS

New Products from BSAP!

Now T-shirts (round neck) and caps (baseball) with the Society's logo are available for sale. The T-shirts are of a light grey colour and sport the logo in front and an Indian Roller on the back with the legend, "Protect Wild Birds." T-shirts are available in 'M, L and XL' sizes. Caps are khaki with a dark green 'peak' and sport the logo in front. The rates are as follows: T-shirts Rs. 150/- each and caps Rs. 50/- each. Outstation orders are welcome and goods will be sent by V.P.P., which charges will have to be paid on receipt of the parcel, including the cost of the goods. Buy for self, family and friends and make the products a success! For further details contact Aasheesh (Phone: 3350683).

Amazing facts about House Sparrows

1. House Sparrows can live to be over 12 years old (oldest ringed bird, 12 years, 11 months).
2. House Sparrows, wherever possible, live in the same breeding colony, with the same mate in the same nest hole, for life.
3. House Sparrows are dependant upon humans and are never found far from them (it is described as a complete commensal of man i.e., it shares the same home but does not directly affect its 'host').
4. House Sparrows have been introduced by humans to North and South America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand together with many oceanic islands.
5. House Sparrows don't roam! Most do not fly further than 3-5km from where they were reared in the nest (they are said to be sedentary).

6. Mostly feed on or near the ground, seed eating (particularly of wild grasses and grain), bread and other man-made food predominates in towns and villages. Nestlings largely fed on soft bodied insects and other arthropods for first three days of life. Adults known to search for spiders' webs for dead and live trapped insects, also car radiators (Simmons 1984). When available, clear preference for cereals from ripening grain heads, spilled seed and animal feed. Average food consumption: kg dry weight per adult per year: Invertebrates 0.55; Weed seeds 1.11; Cereal grain 2.37. [Contributed by Krishna MB krishnamb 2000 @yahoo.com on bngbirds@egroups.com. For more information see <http://www.orkney.com/obrc/factsheet.htm>]

It was celebration time at Society President Siraj Taher's house when his son and BSAP member, Humayun got married to Saba. We wish the couple a long and happy married life!

CONTACT CALLS

"The Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent by Grimmett and the Inskipps has come to my hands, bought at a book exhibition. Much criticism has been made by those who have known the nuances of taxonomy and the distributions of these birds. True, the distribution maps are small. But then, would one be able to know the exact places of occurrence of any bird even if each map were to occupy a full page? Perhaps coordinates on the maps would give some relief and comfort.

"That there are 'inaccuracies' in the distribution maps is to be accepted; that of the Crimson Sunbird is a glaring one. This bird is found far down south on the Western Ghat. The authors seem to have reproduced the map from the birds of India and Pakistan volumes by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley. That of the Black-crested Bulbul too seems to tally with that in the above book. Except that of the Long-tailed Shrike whose distribution is not given by SA and SDR, and hence not comparable with the present map, all others mentioned by Dr Kumar Ghorpadé differ considerably from the distribution maps known to the Indian birdwatchers and ornithologists. One would agree that the distribution of birds cannot be accurately presented in maps; written accounts must complete them. More over maps need to be revised with the arrival of fresh facts, verified and accepted.

"Yet, with whatever little defects there are, I am pleased and excited at being in possession of a copy of the book. 'A book in hand is worth two in the brain'! I chime in with Dr Ghorpadé on the first paragraph of his writing on the theme on page 3 of *Pitta* #115, November 2000." —H. Daniel Wesley, Tiruchirappalli.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

→ **BNHS Programmes** (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2001:

Andaman Islands ii-iii.2001. Corbett National Park iv-v.2001. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. viii-ix.2001. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka xi-xii.2001.

Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) Programme:

January 2001: Southern Region training workshop in "Basic field methodology," at Top Slip, Coimbatore, (T.N.). Open for IBCN partners. Interested parties should contact respective state co-ordinator as participation is limited to 3-4 persons per state. For further details contact: Dr Farah Ishtiaq, IBCN Coordinator at bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in.

25-28.ix.2001: *Australian Ornithological Conference*, Charles Stuart University, Bathurst, NSW, Australia. Website: <http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001>. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

11-17.viii.2002: *23rd International Ornithological Congress (IOC)*, Beijing, China. For more information please contact the IOC website: <http://www.ioc.org.cn/>.

19-22.ix.2002: *Vth International Parrot Convention*, Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife, Spain. Ms. Inge Feier, Directora, Loro Parque Fundación, 38400 Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, España. Tel.: +34 922 374081 Fax: +34 922 375021. E-mail: dir.general@loroparque-fundacion.org. Website: www.loroparque-fundacion.org.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—40

"A species may be defined as a number of individuals closely resembling one another in size, structure, and colors, and propagating like a race...individuals of one species are incapable of producing a fertile offspring when crossed with individuals of another species...

"A variety is considered by some, as one or more individuals resembling certain other individuals sufficiently to be considered identical in species, and yet differing in certain external points of colour, size, or form; and these may, either, propagate individuals precisely like themselves, or revert to what is usually called the type form of the species. Moreover they breed freely with one another, and their offspring is always fertile. Among domesticated animals and plants, we are familiar with numerous varieties, as here defined; **but, in nature, more especially in the animal kingdom, varieties are rare** [emphasis mine—K.G.]; any exceptionally abnormal forms produced are few in individuals, and rarely reproduced; and the variations of all species are bounded within certain fixed limits...

"Some naturalists believe that permanent varieties are common in the animal kingdom, and Kaup calls them sub-species. Such persons consider that their differences from other individuals of what they would term the typical form, do not entitle them to the full rank of a species. Others, again, deny that permanent varieties exist, and state their conviction that even slight differences of colour and size, if found to be constant, are sufficient to constitute such individuals a distinct race or species. When such differences are found to co-exist with a different geographical distribution, I certainly prefer the views of those who look on all permanent distinctions of colour, size, structure, &c., as distinct species, and I believe that no change of climate, or food, or other external circumstances, will produce any alteration in them or in their descendants, if they remain true to each other; and as yet I know of no recorded instance where any well marked race has produced offspring differing from their own, or tending to revert to a supposed original type. That various nearly affined species will propagate, inter se, and produce fertile offspring, I fully believe; as in the cases of the green Pigeons of Bengal and of Southern India; in the Indian and Burmese Rollers; the small Cuckoos of S. India and those of Bengal; and in several other instances: but that this fact militates against their being species, and in favor of their being varieties, I think is not supported by many recent experiments in crossing. Of late years many species have been universally admitted, as such, which were formally considered simple varieties, and, although, perhaps, the tendency of late writers has been to multiply species, in some cases most unnecessarily, yet in previous years the other extreme was taken, more especially by Schlegel and his followers. Our best naturalists and ornithologists now fully recognize the distinctness of permanent races. If varieties are once allowed, it depends on individual judgement or caprice to what extent they may be carried. In this country, where there are many very closely allied species, among genera characteristic of the country, many of the species of *Malacocircus* [= *Turdoides*—K.G.] and *Haematornis* [= *Pycnonotus*—K.G.] would be classed as simple varieties by some, whilst others would perhaps allow some of them, whose different

notes they might have observed, to be distinct species; and the rest varieties. Lastly, it is, I think, more convenient in practice to give each race a distinct specific name, than to speak of them as Var. A. or Var. B. of such a species.

"It is beyond the scope of the present introduction to enter into the question of the origin of affined species. They may, originally, have sprung from type species, as Darwin teaches, and remained permanent in such localities as suited them, and not in others; or, they may have at once been created as distinct species, and their place on earth fixed for them. We rarely find one trespassing far on the limits of the other, but, where they do so meet, hybrids are not uncommon, but such hybrids do not appear to spread beyond the district where the two meet. As far as our brief experience goes, geographic distribution is against Mr. Darwin's theory. To give one example, *Malacocircus striatus* of Ceylon is more allied to *M. bengalensis* of Bengal, than to *M. malabaricus*, which is spread through a vast region between those provinces. Other examples will occur to the Indian Ornithologist. In a vast province like India, we have numerous instances of very closely allied races or species, especially when we compare the birds of India proper with those of the countries to the East of the Bay of Bengal; and many representative species, as Mr. Blyth aptly calls them, are found in Northern and Southern India, and in the Burmese countries; in some cases, extending to a fourth race in Malayana." {This is followed by a condensed and re-worded extract from E. Blyth, 1850, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Volume 19, number 3, pages 221-229, titled "Remarks on the modes of variation of nearly affined species or races of Birds, chiefly inhabitants of India"—K.G.} [T.C. Jerdon, 1862, *The Birds of India*, Vol. 1, pp. xxv-xxviii.]

Hubris, pronounced "hyoo-bris"; meaning an insolent pride or presumption, is a word I learnt from David Quammen's inspiring book *THE SONG OF THE DODO* (see quotation in my Letter 35 in *Pitta* # 109 & 110, May-June 2000) which he had used, in combination with our population explosion and technological efficaciousness (meaning 'desired result'), to pinpoint humanity's dreadful, destructive, impact on the accelerated rate of extinction of the earth's other animals and plants, in recent centuries. I have myself been guilty of hubris, in matters ornithological and entomological, in my younger years. But the last ten years of my serious, focussed labour and intellect on our region's Ornithology has burst my balloon and cracked the sunglasses covering my 'jaundiced eyes' and enabled me to exclaim "Eureka!" (like Archimedes) with tremendous satisfaction and triumph. Hopefully, this month will see the publication of my "A Revised Catalogue and Index of Indian region Birds" in *HUMEA, Field Ornithology* # 9, which will document the results of my critical analytical review of the taxonomy of the Avifauna of the Indian region (minus Burma and Afghanistan, which, when added to our 'region,' make this 'sub-continent'). I will now be able to show my bird watcher colleagues how the bird identification books that were/are available to us, or to our earlier generations, in the last century did not allow correct or precise recognition of good, natural species, but, instead, presented a confused scenario full of "pitfalls" (see Salim Ali, 1985, *THE FALL OF A SPARROW*, pp. 57-58, 61).

In an earlier Letter (# 32, December 1999), I had quoted portions of Hugh Whistler's "An Open Letter to the Editors" of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (in Volume 35, pp. 189-195; 1931) in which he had felt it important to warn the bird watchers of those times in British India about the dangers of guess-work and unquestioning faith in trusting available literature to assist the identifications of birds in the field (and the museum!). As I wrote to Zafar Futehally recently, many bird watchers of these times (who do not really observe and document, but simply like to just 'enjoy') are what I would call "Common Birders" who, for reasons situational in today's fast-paced urban lifestyle and domicile, generally only come across bird species that are termed 'common' in status. The sprinkling of "Rare Birders", who find the time and the means to explore farther afield into the bosom of surviving Mother Nature are, as denoted, simply rare to find today! Perhaps it is these rare gems of our bird watching community who will agree with me when I say to you all that bird IDs are not as simple and straightforward, or easy, as you may think, even if you are armed with good binoculars and the colourfully illustrated "Guide Books" that are available in your 'bird cupboards' today. As I have stated earlier, and increasingly believe as I scrutinize more and more bird taxa ('superspecies', genera), current taxonomic judgements about our bird species are disastrously muddled and misleading, and untrue to the reality existing in the field. Wrong IDs (like a horribly mistaken verdict of "guilty" by a jury in a criminal murder case in court) mean incorrect assignment of biological data to either an entirely different species (life-cycle) or to a bunch of closely related but more than one good species—tragically subsumed as the "subspecies" of human fancy. Salim Ali & Ripley's keys in their *INDIAN HANDBOOK* are very poorly constructed (but their *MUSEUM DIAGNOSIS* is much better) and will not open the locks to precise IDs of many species and subspecies treated by them. Even the *SUBCONTINENT GUIDE* does not give foolproof diagnostic 'characters' that help separate good species (these must not be restricted to plumage and morphology, please note, but also need to be supplemented with preferred habitats, distributions, migration, young birds, eggs, nesting, vocalizations, DNA, etc.), but continues with the confused taxonomy of Stuart Baker and his successors.

Jerdon's 'Introduction,' in our primal book on Indian birds, which he wrote and published soon after Charles Darwin's path-breaking one on 'evolution by natural selection', is quoted above to emphasize the fact that definition and understanding of species (also called 'race' then) limits were clearly comprehended and put down 150 years ago. The haziness that upset this clarity of vision existent through Hodgson, Blyth, Hume, Oates and Blanford was due to what Jerdon mentioned as the 'variety' (current 'subspecies') category clouding the taxonomic judgement of workers preceding and succeeding the *NEW FAUNA* of E.C. Stuart Baker. Taking up Jerdon's own example of the species of "*Malacocircus*" [*sic!*] which are now placed in the genus *Turdoides*, let me demonstrate how current taxonomic categories used by modern, mostly amateur, authors completely 'miss-the-mark' in recognizing real species as even now subsisting in nature. India is the land of Babblers (human ones too!) where these 'seven sisters' or *saat bhai* ('seven brothers' in Hindostani)—breed & feather of birds dominate our territory. The large family Muscicapidae was stated to possess more than one-half of all the species of the song-bird Order Passeriformes in our region (see my Letter # 32, December 1999) and they constitute 28% of all of our 1414+ bird species that occur here. The Muscicapidae were divided into 7 subfamilies by Ripley in his *NEW SYNOPSIS* (see my Letter # 27, July 1999) of which the Timaliinae, comprising of

the Babblers, Jay-Thrush, Parrotbills, Babaxes, Laughing Thrushes, Mesias, Myzornis, Cutia, Shrike-Babblers, Barwings, Minlas, Yuhinas, Tit-Babblers and Sibias include 140 species recognized here. More than one-third of them are endemic to our region. *Turdoides* Cretzschmar, 1826, is an Afro-Indian genus ranging from all of Africa through the Middle East to Burma. Howard & Moore's WORLD CHECKLIST gives 26 world species (76 taxa) of which 10 (18 species and subspecies) occur in the Indian sub-continent, leaving 16 species (58 taxa) found in Africa through the Arabian Peninsula to Persia.

Jerdon's example of geographic distribution, going against Darwin's theory of typical and affined species (the 'typographical species concept' of that era), used the present *Turdoides* "*striatus*" or "Jungle Babbler" taxon. My recent analytical review of this and the related *T. "affinis"* (White-headed Babbler) species has resulted in a significant divergence of opinion from the Ripley—Grimmett & Inskipps' judgements, but a singular concurrence with the views of Jerdon and his contemporaries, of the late 19th Century, who were based in British India. To be brief, what would you bird watchers of today, liturgically indentured to the taxonomy of the last two or three decades say, if I told you that what we all thought was one "Jungle Babbler" and its cousin, the "White-headed Babbler" are actually not 2 but certainly 6 if not 7 or 8 distinct, reproductively isolated species? Whistler's somewhat broadly indicative geographical territories of the "races of Indian birds" [see Whistler, 1928 (1963 reprint of 4th edn), POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, pp. xxiv-xxv] are shown on the map to the "subspecies" of *Turdoides striatus* in the INDIAN HANDBOOK (Vol. 6, p. 225). What Sálim Ali & Ripley, and now even Grimmett & the Inskipps (p. 766, pl. 133), treat as a single species of Jungle Babbler, *Turdoides striatus* Dumont, even though they do recognize constant variations which are obvious and also geographically 'natural', is what I have found to be one of many such 'superspecies' flying around in the faces of us misinformed bird watchers today. Of the 6 subspecies or races of this "Jungle Babbler" mentioned by these authors, I am convinced of the distinctness of *T. malabaricus* Jerdon (occupying the southern Western Ghats and Malabar Coast south of Goa), and of *T. somervillei* Sykes (the northern W. Ghats and the Konkan Coast north of Goa, "a very distinctive race" according to Grimmett & the Inskipps, and called the "Bombay Babbler" in earlier decades), and also perhaps of *T. orissae* Jerdon (the so-called 'Eastern Ghats' north of the Godavari River and the Golconda Coast). *Turdoides striatus* (in the strict sense) and *T. sindianus* Ticehurst (the arid north-west plains) are probably the same species and perhaps not distinct from *T. orientalis* Jerdon of "Dravidia", south of the Indo-Gangetic Plain on which the true *striatus* occurs. So, next time you tick off "Jungle Babbler" or enter notes on it, take care to recognize which of the six taxa you are really dealing with!

Again, what goes under the name *Turdoides affinis* Jerdon, the White-headed Babbler ("Yellow-billed Babbler" of Grimmett & the Inskipps), is a further 'superspecies' of 2 or maybe even 3 discrete, different species! The true White-headed Babbler is restricted to southern India, mainly east of the Western Ghats, in facies drier than those that the true Jungle Babbler and its closely related sister-species inhabit. What occurs in Ceylon and carries the binomen *Turdoides taprobanus* Ripley (= "*striatus*" of older authors) is what I will call "Ripley's Babbler", and is endemic to this island. The comments regarding these species-complexes, by Whistler & Kinnear in the Eastern Ghats Bird Survey report (see JBNHS 35: 737-740; 1932), and then by Sálim Ali, either by himself, or together with Whistler or Abdulali, in his papers on the surveys of birds of the Princely States of Hyderabad (JBNHS 36: 373-374; 1933), Travancore & Cochin (JBNHS 38: 72-74; 1935), Gwalior, Bhopal, Indore and Dhar in the then Central India (JBNHS 41: 86; 1939), Mysore (JBNHS 43: 318-319; 1942), also of the island of Bombay & Salsette (JBNHS 39: 94; 1936), and the then new independent Indian State of Gujarat (JBNHS 52: 753-754; 1955), reveal the complexity of real species identities. The biology and distribution of members of the *Turdoides striatus* / *affinis* species-complex needs to be re-examined afresh. Both about what is already known (specimens, notes, etc.) and what can be studied by us in future in the field, library and museum. This kind of taxonomic uncertainty goes to undeniably justify the need for additional, selective, field sampling of bird specimens to provide critical databases to arrive at reality with species limits as obtaining in nature. After cataloguing the revised species status of our region's birds in my forthcoming paper mentioned above, I am proceeding to publish a series of other papers titled "Systematic Notes on Indian sub-continent Ornithology", which will try to deal with every such superspecies or unresolved species-complexes in detail, spelling out and clarifying the taxonomic confusion and disorder that still exists with our taxa, even today.

Sálim Ali's delightful and painfully nostalgic autobiography, mentioned above, may create a false impression that this late ornithologist 'hero' and Don of ours, who certainly did a lot to popularize bird watching here, really understood bird taxonomy and true identities (he, however, never published any taxonomic paper!). But, after his return to India (from Germany) and following the death of his taxonomic 'lifeline and crutch'—Hugh Whistler—Sálim Ali drifted to field biology and faunistics, thus initiating the beginning of the end of proper, scientific, study of Systematic Ornithology of our vast and diverse, but still very poorly known avifauna. You fiercely regional Andhra birders may like to know that though there was the "Fall of a Sparrow", I can now shortly herald the "Rise of a White-eye"—since I believe that *Zosterops salimalii* Whistler (see JBNHS 36: 811; 1933), or what I will call "Sálim Ali's White-eye", is a distinct species that occurs mainly in your Telugu-speaking State, and has been overlooked and 'underrated' after Whistler had recognized its differences!

In Greek tragedy, "hubris" also means arrogant pride towards the Gods, leading to nemesis. When I am now realizing that we have so many more good species to recognize and credit, as several more diverse life-cycles to be researched and studied, I bemoan and lament the ignorant human attitudes, towards our rich biodiversity, that are responsible for the almost total annihilation of what evolution had created in our sub-continent through its historical past over the last several hundred million years. Do we want this hubris of ours to lead us to a nemesis again, because of our arrogant pride towards the Gods of Nature, which are our only real live-givers and sustainers on earth?

[Errata: Letter 39 in *Pitta* # 115—Page 3: Quotation reference line 1 should read “Jeffrey”; Text Para 1 Line 9 should read “extremely”; Text Para 2 Line 1 should read “Letter”; Page 4: Para 2, penultimate line should read “inadequate and erroneous data?”; Para 3, Line 5 from bottom should read “this was also distinct from”; Last Para, Line 8 from bottom should read “depicted on the SUBCONTINENT”.]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

FIELD CRAFT: How to take good field notes—Robert B. Payne

Your field notebook is your entry to memory and is your record of your developing skills in observation and interpretation. Keep it with you on all field trips. A sturdy notebook that fits into a pocket can be with you all the time. A bound notebook holds up better than a spiral book, and one with a stiff cover is handy to write on while you are in the field.

Print your name on the inside cover of the notebook. Also, in case you lose the notebook, list an address (yours, or the instructors' or GSIs' depending on your security concerns) and a phone number or e-mail address so the notebook can get back to you.

For each day in the field, first enter the date and locality. Find out where you are! Underline this information on the top of a new page for each day. When you have written several pages, repeat the date on top of each left-hand page, but underline date and locality on only the first page, so you can see where observations began. A smudge-proof ballpoint pen is more permanent than a pencil; previous generations of bird biologists have used indelible ink. Pen is best. Never erase, because your first impression might be correct. Instead, draw a single line (pencil best) through the erroneous note, but do not obliterate it.

What to record in your notebook: First, indicate the general conditions of observation (time, weather, temperature, wind then, or the night before) that might affect the birds you see and what they do. Also briefly describe the habitat (closed maple forest with trees over 20 m high, lakeshore with cottages and motorboats, etc.). List each species you see, and the number of individuals for each species. This will provide basic data on the occurrence and relative numbers of birds which change with habitats and seasons. For numbers of birds, use a vertical mark for each bird; for a flock, note the number with a circle around the number. Because it is easier to find information on each bird if the birds are in some kind of sequence in your notebook, you can note sets in check-list sequence if you see several at once. Wait a few minutes between observations, then, enter the data; this means you do not have to write while you are busy watching or looking for more birds, but don't wait till the end of the day. For behavior observations made in detail on a bird or on a nest, start each entry with the time of day. Use the 24-hour clock, e.g. 1300 = 1 pm. You can add notes that will help you identify the bird the next time you encounter it, such as the words you would set to describe a bird's song, or the flight pattern of a hawk. Also try to identify a food item if you see a bird feeding, and describe the way it finds the food or treats it after capture. An objective of keeping a field notebook is to put your own observations into words, and in the process to sharpen your own powers of observation. Another is to be able to recall your observations at a later time.

Sketches are helpful too. Sketches firm up your ideas of field marks, show the postures in behavior, the shape and location of a nest, maps of where you go, and so on.

After the field trip, write your general summary comments on the field exercise, with observations such as the kinds of birds that were nesting, or the great numbers of birds in fall migration on the mudflats after a night of cold winds from the north, or describe in more detail the behavior of a bald eagle as it killed a goose and what the goose did about it, or whatever observation you choose to elaborate. As with all writing, don't write something you wouldn't want your peers to read. The notebook is your primary record of fieldwork and your personal observations of birds, and the summary after the field trip is the place to interpret what you see. Distinguish between what you see, and what you consider to be the ecological significance of your observations.

A good way to organize the summary and commentary notes is to take field notes only on the right-hand page of the notebook, and add comments and explanations that you think of later on the left-hand page just opposite the field notes. This way you can return later and write sidebars without confusing the original. [Contributed by Nitin Jamdar to: Birds of Bombay birdsofbombay@egroups.com.]

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow. S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills (AP)

27.xi.2000: EUROPEAN CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus* 1 imm.

7.xii: YELLOW-BROWED LEAF WARBLER *Phylloscopus inornatus*.

9.xii: BLACK-NAPED MONARCH 1 M.

11.xii: GREY HORNBILL 1 M; PURPLE SUNBIRD M coming into br. plm.

15.xii: INDIAN PITTA hrd.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (AP, SU, KK)

26.xi.2000: PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 1 yng bird without red frontal shield; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA in non br., plm.; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 imm.

10.xii: (AP, CTH): COMB DUCK 15, in non br., plm; BLACK-WINGED KITE PRB, a pair courting; STEPPE EAGLE 2; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 1; ROSY PASTOR; GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK *Calandrella brachydactyla*; BLUE-THROAT; RED MUNIA PRB, 1 M carrying N mat; SPOTTED MUNIA flocks of 20+ juv feeding on grass seeds.

15.xii: (AP, CTH): BONELLI'S EAGLE 1 stalking an injured purple moorhen; BROWN CRAKE 2; SMALL GREEN BEE EATER sunning on wires with back to sun & feathers of upper back and nape erected; BLUE-TAILED BEE EATER sunning like small green bee eater; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER 1 in non-br plm; BLUE-THROAT;

KARNATAKA

MYSORE DISTRICT 2000 (AE)

Bogadi Lake 9.ix

COUCAL with a spiny lizard in its beak.

Bogadi Lake

7.ix: GREY PELICAN 3.

8.ix: GREY PELICAN 2; COOT 40; DARTER 1.

22.ix: BLACK IBIS 1; DARTER 2; SPOTBILL DUCK 6; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 2 pairs; GREY TIT PRB, with N-mat.; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB, 1 juv.

Mysore City

5.xi: SCAVENGER VULTURE 3.

6.xi: BLUE-TAILED BEE EATER 6; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 1; HOUSE SPARROW C, especially outside city.

Ranganathitoo Bird Sanctuary

3.ix: WHITE IBIS 1000+; OPENBILL STORK CB, N-period ending; NIGHT HERON 50+ CB, juv birds seen; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 1; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER 10.

UTTARA KANNADA DISTRICT

Attiveri Bird Sanctuary

19.xi.2000 (GD): WHITE IBIS 500; LITTLE CORMORANT 500; COOT CB, 2 ad with 4 yng; CATTLE EGRET 2000; SPOONBILL 2; BLACK-HEADED BUNTING 100; INDIAN TREE PIPIT.

22.xii.2000 (AA): WHITE IBIS c. 100s roosting on *Acacia* sp. on the shores; CATTLE, LARGE, MEDIAN, & LARGE EGRET in 100s roosting on *Acacia* sp. On the shores.; LITTLE CORMORANT roosting in large numbers; DARTER few; OPENBILL STORK 30; PAINTED STORK 3; PINTAIL 4.

KERALA

IDIKKI DISTRICT

Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary 6.x.2000 AP

MALABAR GREY HORNBILL 1; FAIRY BLUE BIRD 1 M; WHITE-NECKED STORK PRB, a pair mating 30'-40' up; BLUE-WINGED PARAKEET; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO CB, 1 juv; BRONZED DRONGO; HILL MYNA abundant, especially in clearings; WHITE-BELLIED TREEPIE; SCARLET MINIVET; BLACK-HEADED YELLOW BULBUL; RUFOUS BABBLER; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH.

RAJASTHAN

BIKANER DISTRICT (SG)

Loonkaran Sar Lake

18.xi.2000: SHOVELLER 15; COMMON POCHARD 20; BLACK-WINGED STILT 45; SCAVENGER VULTURE 6.

20.xi.2000: BLACK IBIS 12; MALLARD 15; GREYLAG GOOSE 6; HERRING GULL 22; LARGE EGRET 32.

SRI GANGANAGAR DISTRICT (SG)

Gajner Lake

19.xi.2000: COOT 500+; EASTERN STEPPE EAGLE 1; WIGEON 20; COMMON POCHARD 21; TUFTED DUCK 6; GADWAL 26; SHOVELLER M 25 F 22;

Piperan Lake

20.xi.2000: LESSER FLAMINGO 67; COMMON CRANE 32; COOT 140; COMMON POCHARD 46.

Suratgarh Lake

18.xi.2000: SHOVELLER 400+; LESSER FLAMINGO 35; COOT 100+; PAINTED STORK 1 juv.

20.xi.2000: TUFTED DUCK 4; WHITE-EYED POCHARD 3; PAINTED STORK 6 juv.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approxim-atly; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20, Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

Note: The two columns Field Craft & Spotlight by Siraj Taher will resume from February 2001.

IP



TTTA

 16/2
2001

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 118: February 2001

PROGRAMME

Indira ed 18/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098), Aasheesh (3350683) or, Siraj (6612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis.

Sunday, 25-ii-2001: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District: At 692m asl, and part of the Anantgiri Reserve Forest block, Anantgiri is famous for its TB sanatorium and salubrious climate. There will be a rash of warblers and other passerine migrants on their way back to summer quarters. A bonus might be the resident pair of Crested Hawk-Eagles that nest in a Eucalyptus plantation. Other attractions are Orange-headed Ground Thrush, White-eye, Fantail Flycatchers, various flycatchers, Golden Oriole, etc. Route: Mehdiapatnam-Tipu Bridge at Artillery Centre-Chilkur-Moinabad-Vikarabad-Anantgiri. Distance is about 60km from the city. Members are requested to assemble near bus stand at Anantgiri by 8am. Carry water and lunch if you plan to stay for the day. For directions contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 19-ii-2001, 6 p.m.: Screening of BBC's "The Life of Birds," by David Attenborough, Part 3 (1 hour). Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER IN RISHI VALLEY

V. Santharam *Nycticorax*

On 9 December 2000, we came across a Blue-bearded Bee-Eater (*Nycticorax athertoni*) in Rishi Valley, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, on the Big Banyan tree. This bird, about the size of a myna (though a little slimmer in build) and with a prominent bill, was seen during the course of our weekend birdwatching session. Being familiar with the bird, having seen it on several earlier occasions in the Western Ghats, I was easily able to identify it and all the children and two colleagues accompanying me were able to see the bird and its features and colours. The bird was not too active and was seen perched on a rotten branch, catching bees as they flew about, from its perch. A few minutes later it flew to a beehive higher up the tree and sometime later flew out of the tree towards west.

The next morning, after another session of birdwatching, I stayed back in the vicinity of the Big Banyan hoping to locate the bird. I could not locate it for over 15 minutes that I spent under the tree. A few minutes later as I was observing some birds about 50m from the tree, I heard the distinct, familiar calls of the bee-eater, "korr-korr-korr-kok-kok." I rushed back to the tree and within minutes located the bird perched on a branch not too high up on the tree. With the morning light falling on the bird, its blue 'beard' was clearly noticeable as was its pale blue forehead. The yellowish green belly contrasted sharply with its green plumage. I could also clearly see the orange-red iris, yellow-green legs and pale brown beak. The bird sat on the perch, preening itself for well over five

minutes before moving and getting obscured by the dense canopy.

On 31 December I again heard calls of this bird on the campus. On the morning of 3 January 2001, we heard the calls of the bee-eater in the campus and located it perched on some tall trees in full view. Several of us noticed the bird before it flew to another tree nearby. The next morning we again heard it and had a glimpse of it as it flew.

The distribution of this bird includes Western Ghats, Shevaroy Hills and the Eastern Ghats range (Vizag-Sambalpur) in southern India. Rishi Valley, located in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, is at least 200km to the north of Shevaroy, the nearest known locality of occurrence of this species. I have been regularly going out watching birds on the campus and nearby Horsley Hills since June 1998 but it is only on these few occasions that I have seen this bird here.

OPERATION HARRIER: Harrier survey of the Indian Subcontinent

Vibhu Prakash

"The Bombay Natural History Society in collaboration with the Hawk and Owl Trust of U.K. has been working on the harriers for the last six years. The project has found a number of roosts in different parts of the country. The major roosts identified are at Velavadar National Park, Gujarat, Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Banni Grasslands, Kutch, Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh.

"We would now like to develop an inventory of all the roost sites of harriers in the country with your help, which

shall go a long way in helping the harrier conservation. This is a preliminary attempt in gathering information on the roosting sites. From next year, we shall attempt to organise a co-ordinated roost count throughout the subcontinent. All contributions will be duly acknowledged and a report will be sent to all the contributors.

"If you already know of a roost, please complete the site details overleaf and, if you can, make a preliminary count of the harriers there as soon as possible, preferably in late January/early February. If numbers of harriers regularly occur in your area but no roosts are known, please report this to us and try to locate where the harriers fly to and converge in the evening. If there are sites with deep, uncut grass, wetlands or other areas with thick ground vegetation, then these might be fruitful to check out for roosting behaviour during the hour up to dusk. Typical behaviour consists of 'milling', or a number of harriers flying seemingly randomly around the same small area until they decide precisely where to settle for the night."

[Editors' Note: Readers wishing to participate in this survey should contact the Hon. Secretary for copies of the 'Harrier Roost Information Data Sheet.' Completed sheets should be sent back to the BSAP to enable consolidation of the Society's database and certitude of BSAP's contribution to this survey.]

Rare birds: What should be documented?

Document any bird out of place seasonally or geographically, no matter how common the bird is elsewhere or at other seasons or easy the identification. So that there will be no confusion about what constitutes a good report let me outline the criteria:

1. Written notes should be taken at the time of, and preferably during, the observation, not 15 minutes or more later. Notes written later, and particularly after a field guide has been checked are much less credible. Notes that read like a field guide are even less credible.
2. The notes should be made before any field guide is checked. At this point getting a good unbiased description is much more important than putting a name on the bird. If your notes are good enough you will be able to name the bird after it has disappeared. And that is how reviewers will judge your notes.
3. The notes should detail every field mark seen. They should also include characters that are not necessarily essential to the identification. Preferably you should give a fairly detailed bill to tail tip description. Include shape as well as plumage. Describe only what you see e.g. if only the left underwing is seen say so. Compare it with nearby birds. Describe any vocalizations. Think in terms of describing the bird to a blind person. Remember you are trying to convince skeptics (who haven't seen the bird).
4. The notes should include the date, time, duration of the observation, exact locality, habitat, and when the notes were written. Optical equipment used, names of additional observers, angle of sun relative to the bird and observer, the bird's behavior and any other factor that might influence your observation are also important. The notes can be a collaborative effort, but say so. If you are seeing a

previously reported rarity be especially careful to make the identification yourself.

5. A series of photographs is excellent documentation, second only to a bird in the hand ... Knowledge of light conditions are important in interpreting photographs. Sketches, however crude, can be useful.
6. After all this is done get the word out to other birders. Of course if you are with a group yell out as soon as you are confident you have found something different. But don't count on anybody else taking notes. In fact, in such a situation several independent sets of notes can be helpful.

[Nitin Jamdar on birdsofbombay@yahoo.com, downloaded from <http://www.google.net/>.]

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2001:

Corbett National Park iv-v. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. viii-ix. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka xi-xii.

Bangalore Field Club of Bangalore: Birdwatching outing every 2nd Sunday of every month. Meet at Lalbagh Glass House, 0730hrs. For details contact JN Prasad at Tel: 91-80-664 4682 / 6653350. Fax: 91-80-665 3350. Mobile: (0) 98440-07351. E-mail: jnprasad@usa.net.

9-12.v.2001: Third International Hornbill Workshop, Phuket, Thailand. For more information contact Secretariat, Dr. Pilai Poonswad, Hornbill Research Foundation, c/o Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Rama 6 Road, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. Tel: +662-246003 extn 4606. Fax: +662-6445411. E-mail: scpps@mucc.mahidol.ac.th.

August 2001: Asian Wetland Symposium 2001, Penang, Malaysia. Further details at: E-mail: Dr. Taej Mundkur tajej@wiap.nasionet.net. Website: <http://aws2001.domainvalet.com>.

25-28.ix.2001: Australian Ornithological Conference, Charles Stuart University, Bathurst, NSW, Australia. Website: <http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001>. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

11-17.viii.2002: 23rd International Ornithological Congress (IOC), Beijing, China. For more information contact the IOC at E-mail: infocenter@ioc.org.cn or Website: <http://www.ioc.org.cn/>. Deadline for submission of contributed papers is 1 July 2001.

19-22.ix.2002: Vth International Parrot Convention, Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife, Spain. Ms. Inge Feier, Directora, Loro Parque Fundación, 38400 Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Espana. Tel: +34-922-374081 Fax: +34-922-375021. E-mail: dir.general@loroparque-fundacion.org. Website: www.loroparque-fundacion.org.

... Continued on page 6

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—41

"Hartert's epoch making work *DIE VÖGEL DER PALÄARKTISCHEN FAUNA* was published (in German) between 1903 and 1922, and followed up by a supplement by Hartert & Steinbacher in 1938. Only the older generation of ornithologists are in a position to appreciate the truly monumental character of that work and will remember the revolutionary impact it made upon the ornithological trends and thinking of that time. It was the first large-scale projection of the subspecies concept into bird taxonomy, and a subject of much spirited (and sometimes even acrimonious) wordy exchanges and controversy among the more conservative pandits [sic] of the day. But looking back, there is no doubt whatever that much of the enormous progress in avian systematics during the last 50 years was made possible entirely by the universal acceptance of the subspecies concept and the trinomial nomenclature which enabled minor variations to be recorded and interpreted in a meaningful way. Hartert's publication, therefore, marked the end of an epoch in scientific ornithology no less than the beginning of a new and more dynamic one. And it is the genius of Ernst Hartert and his monumental work that have since led the way in ornithological thought and practice, in the Old World as well as the New. But the fillip that the new system gave to all branches of Ornithology, particularly in Europe and Asia, led to the extension of field work into many areas till then little known and unexplored, resulting in a better understanding of geographical variation and in the description of many new forms. Thus the need of a comprehensive, up-to-date systematic list of Palaearctic birds became insistent, and doubly so since Hartert's volumes were out of print and had become practically unprocurable...

"Few people would have better facilities and qualifications for undertaking this stupendous task than Dr. Charles Vaurie of the American Museum of Natural History, New York... In addition to his, so to say, congenital aptitude for taxonomical work, and what the late C.B. Ticehurst called 'the eye of faith', Dr. Vaurie had the benefit of constant discussion with and advice of such savants as Erwin Stresemann and Ernst Mayr—all of which lends the impress of added authoritativeness to his volume."

"...It is inevitable in a work of this kind that specialists should disagree with this or that of the author's opinions and conclusions, and with his views on individual phylogenetic relationships. These are things on which no finality is possible, and in the last reckoning must depend on individual 'taste and fancy'..."

[Sálim Ali, 1959, reviewing Vaurie's *THE BIRDS OF THE PALAEARCTIC FAUNA—PASSERIFORMES*, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 56: 307-309]

"...it does seem to me that there are eyes turning to Asia and these older eyes often have younger graduate students or PhD students attached. In addition taxonomy and systematics is being revisited by scientists who avoided it because it didn't pay or didn't help them get grants. Now that they can throw 'sexy' DNA and acoustic studies into their proposals they seem happy to come back to these studies. Whether they all have the knowledge needed to direct such studies, and any background knowledge of Asia and its birds, is a moot point, but we shall have to make do with what we get. We can then, as we have always had to, sift the convincing well argued and well documented cases from the chaff..."

[Edward C. Dickinson, in litt., 22.xii.2000]

I have been browsing with my electronic 'mouse' (*Mus electronicus*!) through Internet discussion sites, in Ornithology and Natural History on the computer, for the past couple of years and methinks 'tis time to say what has to be said and is in my mind for some time now.

Maybe I am not in the know of things, but I ask what is the use of such bird lists being put on one site and being responded to by one or more persons who take the trouble to reply, and then that's it? In scientific publishing there are rules and norms and procedures. As I see it, none of these databases on the Internet, unless formally published in a reputed scientific or semi-scientific periodical, should actually (or can) be accepted as having been made available to Science. For one thing, computerised information is not available to the overwhelming majority of humankind. Two, I see absolutely no refereeing process involved and even moderation is seen to be anti-so-and-so (the philosopher Karl Popper) by one site 'owner'. Which means, anything can be put on the net by subscribers and it is swallowed whole (or part!) by others on the 'net'. Where is this taking us and who is benefiting?

I believe either I must be enlightened adequately that what is on the net is a valid document and available to Science, or someone must tell me how 'netters' are going to take a decision to sort and screen what is 'listed' and then recommend that the author(s) publish their important findings in a refereed scientific periodical. Except for a few people, I see that most of the matter on these discussion sites pertains either to conservation or to questions about things one can acquire from a book or a local expert, or to such birding 'lists' with mainly English names (Ripley's or Inskipp's) which I find highly suspicious. Will somebody help me out?

Second, and more important. Bird watching nowadays is becoming more 'twitching, ticking' or whatever. My German bird watcher friend in Goa told me of these hordes of 'twitchers' who land there, plane-load by plane-load, and start 'twitching'. If there is any published list, it is usually in obscure, privately printed booklets, unavailable in this country. It is about time scientists like me made amateurs aware that they still have a great deal to discover, describe and detail about the avifauna of this huge sub-continent. Where are the 'select few' who are going to help us scientists urge and assist them to do this?

These 'Letters' of mine have been appearing over the past 5 years in this Bulletin, the *Pitta*, as regular readers of my column will know. I dealt first with the history and aims of Indian Ornithology, then went on to analyse and summarize its taxonomy (Ripley Vs Sibley/Monroe), and now am dealing with our biogeography. I do not pretend to be any expert bird specialist, but, with all humility, perhaps what I know about our birds, overall, is much beyond most, if not all, of anyone living in this sub-continent, with the certain exception of Humayun Abdulali.

I am going to write here about the "Greater Flameback" of Inskipp *et al.* (meaning 'and others' in Latin), earlier better known as the Larger Goldenbacked Woodpecker. Its scientific name is taken as *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* Scopoli, uncritically, and this is supposed to have at least 4 "subspecies" in our sub-continent. I believe that taxonomists from Stuart Baker (NEW FAUNA) onwards through Ripley made a '*khichdi*' (called 'Kedgerie' in British Indian of the Raj years, a tasty mix of rice and pulses), of Systematic Ornithology of this sub-continent, reduced inexplicably after Stuart Baker to a "region" by deleting Burma (*Myanmar* in native tongue) and Afghanistan from it. The subspecies 'fashion' came in with the 'New Systematics' of Huxley and ruined the old, stable, and erudite species concepts that were documented by Oates & Blanford (OLD FAUNA) at the turn of the 19th Century. I am a trained and experienced taxonomist and have worked on taxa of insects, but with those of spiders, birds, mammals, plants, reptiles, *etc.*, also examined professionally for greater finesse and philosophy.

I looked at the works of Ripley, Baker, Oates & Blanford (the OLD FAUNA—this was a compilation of works by Sykes, Tickell, Hodgson, Blyth, Jerdon, Hume and such pioneers who worked in this land and knew the avifauna very well), the Inskipp's, Grimmett, King, Abdulali, Biswas, Henry, Howard & Moore, Lindsey, Duckworth, Whistler, Ticehurst, Kinnear, Koelz, Mayr, Alström, *etc.*, (Sálim Ali was no taxonomist, by the way!). Also, many works of the old, old days published in the *JBNHS*, the *Journal of the Asiatic*

Society of Bengal, and others. When I looked at the current NEW (and OLD) SYNOPSIS of Ripley and compared it with Inskipp *et al.*, and now Grimmett & Inskipp, genus by genus and subspecies by subspecies, I realized (from my insect taxonomy experience) that species and generic concepts of our birds were almost totally appalling and incorrect! In my UPDATED CHECKLIST OF INDIAN ORNITHOLOGY (1998, *Humea* # 6) I had tried to revise the taxonomy, blank out "subspecies" and take a re-look at genuine species and also endemics. Far from Ripley's 1200+ species and 170+ endemics of 1961 & 1982, I was able to recognize more than 1400+ species and almost 300 endemics! My A REVISED CATALOGUE AND INDEX OF INDIAN REGION BIRDS, which will be out shortly, further clarifies the "subspecies question". What this will do to our bird watching brethren's (and sisterhoods!) infobase is bound to be shocking. Not only do we have almost double the number of resident endemics still surviving in our sub-continent (this natural area approximates almost to the territories of British India, including Afghanistan, Ceylon and Burma, by the way), but we also have 200-250 more genuine, distinct species here, breeding, visiting or straying.

The subspecies concept was a 'mirage' created by human beings with the 'mihi itch' (craze for authorship of 'new' names) and taxonomic 'licence'. Yes, there are polymorphic species, but, hardly any genuine subspecies. If populations are reproductively isolated in nature and form closed gene pools, also exhibiting some kind of distinct morphological character(s), what justification is there in subsuming such distinct populations under another species that may 'look' something like it and have a wider (or even discontinuous) distribution?

One more, biogeographical, blunder that has been carrying on for the past several decades is the notion that India has received its fauna and flora almost entirely from neighbouring lands and had little of its own when it hit Asia as the Indian Plate (or, poetically, "Dravidia" of the writer E.M. Forster). Prof. M.S. Mani (now still active in his 90s!) first began demolishing this erroneous concept in the 1970s and now, my close friend and intellectual confidant, Dr Harish Gaonkar (Copenhagen, Denmark; student of Butterflies) is adding substance to this entirely opposite theorization. It is Peninsular India and the Central Highlands, both south of the very recently formed Indo-Gangetic Plains, and even the Garo—Khasi—Jaintia—Mikir Hills, that have been the major source areas for the biodiversity that occurs on the newly raised Himalayas (and Western Ghats). These magnificent mountains have what is termed a "Bastard" Fauna and Flora—their 'parentage' in doubt! There have been influxes from the Malayan and Indo-Chinese and Palearctic regions but it still remains to be properly analysed as to what the real origins of the Himalayan and Assam—Burma areas' biodiversity are. Those of extreme N.W. India, Pakistan and westwards are distinctly 'Ereman' or Mediterranean. What is the African element that Ripley wrote so much about? There is so much to do...and learn, but we are already forming permanent impressions and assuming that we know almost all there is to know about this ancient and megadiverse sub-continent! Pity.

David Bookless' (a subscriber of a discussion site, who prompted this article which I had put on the 'net' in June last year) "Greater Flameback" with a 'red back' is certainly the Western Ghats population of what is named "*Chrysocolaptes lucidus* Scopoli" nowadays (SYNOPSIS # 860-863, SUBCONTINENT GUIDE, p. 390, pl. 16). Dave's imagination and knowledge have been exposed through his misidentification of the "Nilgiri Laughing Thrush". No matter. Unless mistakes are made and then corrected, knowledge does not expand and become more authentic. I have a greater doubt. I say that *C. lucidus* does not occur in India at all. What we have are definitely 3, maybe 4, species 'lumped' as "*C. lucidus*" which itself is an extralimital species. Nobody has worked the taxonomy of Indian woodpeckers properly for the last 50-100 years. Grimmett & Inskipp refer to the work of L.L. Short (1973) but that mostly deals with behaviour. What did Ripley and his assistants do? Make 'official' several "subspecies" that confounded rather than cleared bird taxonomy in this area. The name applied now to the Western Ghats population of "*C. lucidus*" is "*C. striatus chersonesus*" Kloss whose type-locality is Malaya! I doubt if this and Koelz's "*C. guttacrastatus socialis*" (type-locality: Jagalbet, in North Kanara, Karnataka) is one and the same species. The Ceylon population is "*Brachypterus stricklandi*" Layard with a distinct crimson-red back and a disjunct distribution and many other significant species characters. Why is this lumped as a "subspecies" of the mainland Indian populations and of true extra-Indian *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*? The north Indian population that also occurs in the eastern "Central Highlands" south to the Godavari River is correctly "*Picus Guttacrastatus*" Tickell. It may also turn out that the Himalayan 'master' Brian Hodgson's "*Picus Sultaneus*" from western Nepal west of the Kali—Gandaki River is really reproductively isolated and distinct from the eastern Himalayan/Indian *C. guttacrastatus*. I am not exaggerating or wrongly highlighting these kinds of taxonomic blunders that I see in almost every currently held "polymorphic" taxon of our birds. I am also now working on A CONSPECTUS OF THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT AVIFAUNA (including Afghanistan, Burma and some congenial areas just north of the Himalayas) and will be able to justify my species concepts and my committed feeling that there are over 1600 distinct species in our sub-continent, out of which more than 350 are our actual endemics. What this revised understanding of our birds will do to conservation strategies, all of you will hopefully realize. Even complete distributions of many species are not known. All kinds of generalizations and statistical "analyses" are being attempted, with hardly 40% of the databases before us. "Hot Spots" are being targeted and made champions of conservation, when the original habitats from where these animals and plants of the Himalayas and the Western Ghats (+ Ceylonese highlands) came and are really the source areas are being overlooked! Do you all see my point?

Nature is very resourceful and regenerative. All it needs is for humans to leave it alone. Conservation ethic is interference in the privacy of our other wild, living co-habitants. It is we who need 'sanctuaries' and restricted areas of movement and land-use. I am genuinely perplexed at this aggressive, activist hype by so-called conservationists who 'block' badly needed taxonomic research, and 'ban' sampling in protected areas whose biodiversity is not even minimally documented! Yes, we all need to come together to save what was not created by us, but we need only to protect and restore it carefully by allowing limited access (only for scientific research and conservation strategies) to authorized specialist humans trained for this important work. Restored areas will then once again attract biodiversity from these relict, originally natural, areas. People like Dave and other 'eco-tourists' can still "twitch and tick" in restored peripheral areas but kindly keep out of Nature's private property, the "Sanctum Sanctorum".

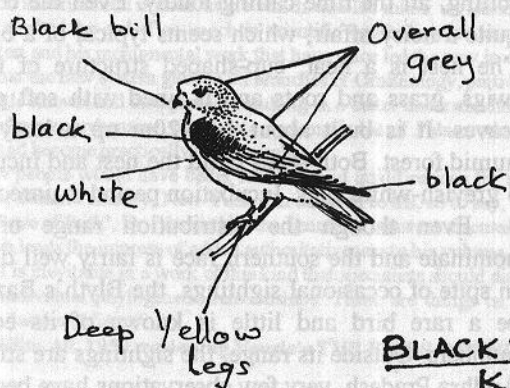
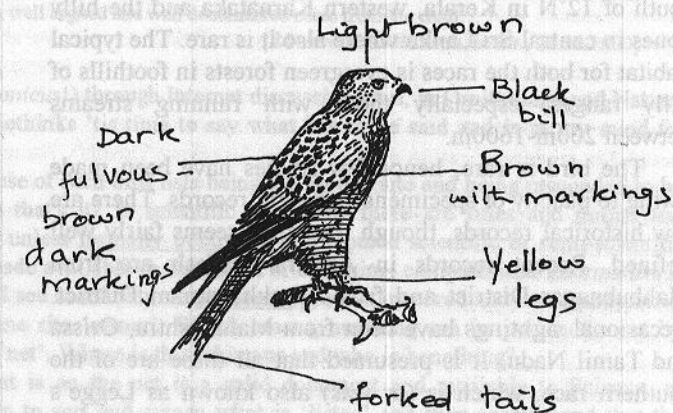
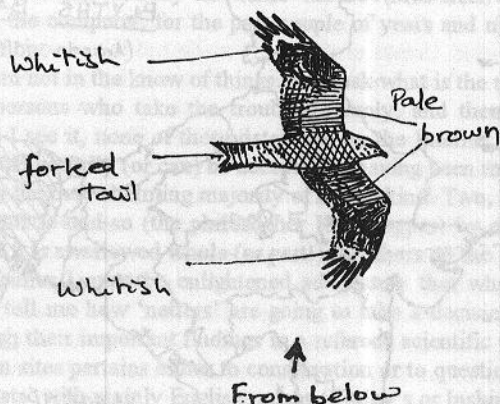
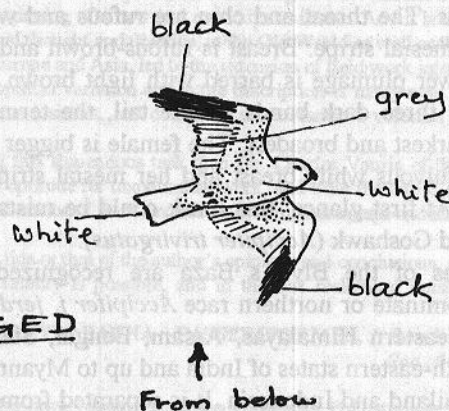
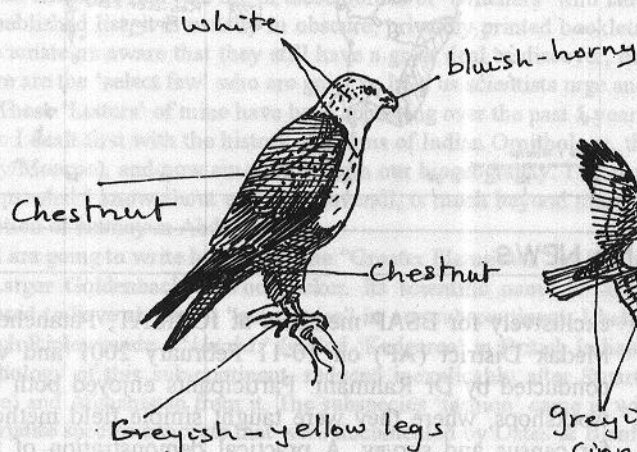
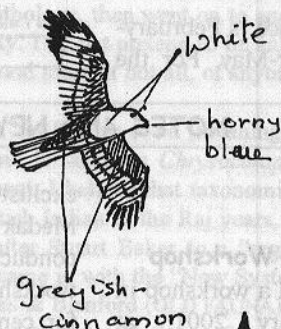
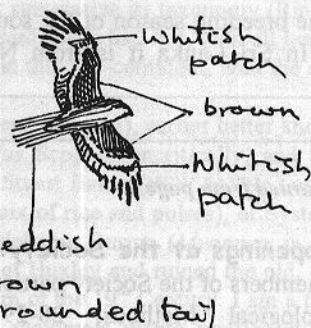
Well there, that's done. Comments are welcome, but only from people who know enough to comment logically. Others may please read and learn, and, if generous, help us scientists with critical data, hopefully to be published in refereed periodicals after being carefully sifted and compiled from the more important and interesting mailings on the internet or your field notes.

[Errata: Letter 40 in *Pitta* # 117—Page 4: Text Para 3, Lines 4 & 5 should read "(=*striatus* Swainson not Dumont)"; Last Para, Penultimate Line should read "want this hubris". Letter 32 in *Pitta* # 104—Page 4: Para 2, Line 3 should read "157 species in 22 genera".]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

FIELD CRAFT By Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

KITES (Family Accipitridae): Amongst the most primitive of Falconiformes, kites are long-winged, mostly long-tailed birds, expert at soaring and circling. Some of them are amongst the commonest of birds of prey with a very wide distribution. Their food is largely animal matter including carrion. While some can be found in varied habitats, a few are seen near waterbodies. Usually the females are larger than the males and the young darker than the adults.

**BLACKWINGED KITE****PARIAH KITE****BRAHMINY KITE****Juvenile**

SPOTLIGHT: Blyth's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

A medium-sized brown hawk (about the size of a jungle crow) it has a dark brown and rufous head with a prominent, long black crest. The edges of the crest have thin white tips. The throat and chin are rufous and white with a black mesial stripe. Breast is rufous-brown and the rest of the lower plumage is barred with light brown and white. Of the three dark bands on the tail, the terminal band is the darkest and broadest. The female is bigger and paler with a fulvous white breast and her mesial stripe is less defined. At first glance, this hawk could be mistaken for the Crested Goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*).

Two races of the Blyth's Baza are recognized in India—the nominate or northern race *Accipiter j. jerdoni*, found in the eastern Himalayas, Assam, Bengal, Sikkim and other north-eastern states of India and up to Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. It is separated from the slightly smaller southern race *A. j. ceylonensis*, by about 200km. This race is found scattered in southwest India, south of 12°N in Kerala, western Karnataka and the hilly zones in central Sri Lanka where also it is rare. The typical habitat for both the races is evergreen forests in foothills of hilly ranges, especially those with running streams between 200m-1600m.

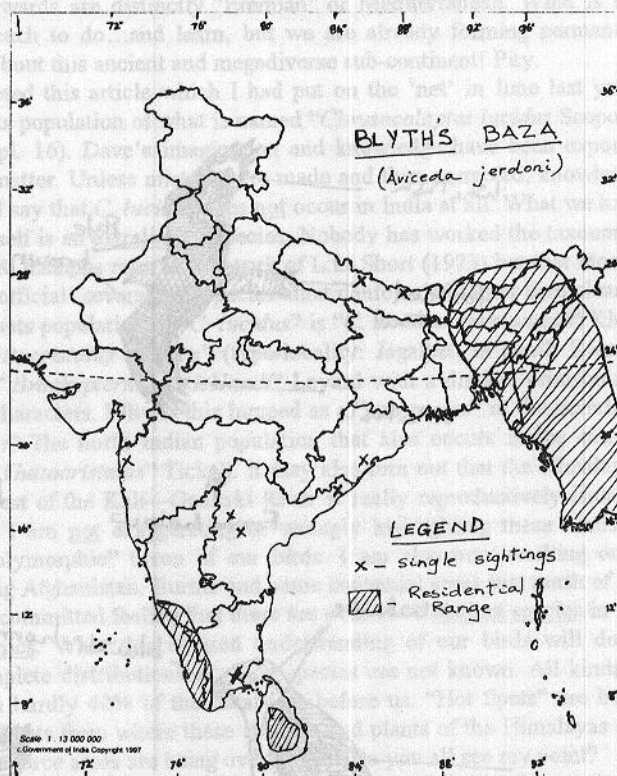
The bird is rare, hence few studies have been made owing to paucity of specimens and sight records. There are few historical records, though the range seems fairly well defined. Recent records in Andhra Pradesh are from Mahbubnagar District and from Visakhapatnam District. Occasional sightings have been from Maharashtra, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. It is presumed that all these are of the southern race, which is (or was) also known as Legge's Baza.

There is little or no record of its habits as it is a crepuscular bird (active only at dawn or dusk) and also being a bird of dense forest, it is less often seen. It has a sluggish flight and is normally found in pairs or small parties of 3-5 birds. Rarely seen except flying above treetops and sometimes at sholas and clearings. Their food consists of lizards, frogs, grasshoppers, insects and small animals.

The breeding season of the southern race is February-April. In Sri Lanka it is from November-May. For the

northern race it is from April-June. It has a spectacular and vociferous display—diving, rising, toppling and rolling, all the time calling loudly. Even the copulation is quite a noisy affair, which seems typical of a bird of prey. The nest is a neat, cup-shaped structure of fresh green twigs, grass and roots and is lined with soft grasses and leaves. It is built about 10m-20m up a leafy tree, in a humid forest. Both sexes build the nest and incubate the 2-3 greyish-white eggs. Incubation period is unrecorded.

Even though the distribution range of both the nominate and the southern race is fairly well defined, and in spite of occasional sightings, the Blyth's Baza seems to be a rare bird and little is known of its ecology and numbers. Outside its range, the sightings are still fewer. In Andhra Pradesh, very few observations have been recorded and except in the extreme southwest and south, it may be considered a very rare bird or even a vagrant.



NOTES AND NEWS

... Continued from page 2.

Happenings at the Society: IBCN Workshop

Four members of the Society participated in a workshop in Ornithological Methods, 28-29 January 2001, at Mudumalai, Tamil Nadu. Dr Asad R Rahmani, Director, BNHS and Dr Farah Ishtiaq, Coordinator, IBCN conducted the workshop. A similar workshop was held

exclusively for BSAP members at ICRISAT, Patancheru, Medak District (AP) on 10-11 February 2001 and was conducted by Dr Rahmani. Participants enjoyed both the workshops, where they were taught simple field methods for census and survey. A practical demonstration of the techniques was also given in the field. BSAP would like to thank IBCN and ICRISAT for their help and support in making these events successful and meaningful.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Horsley Hills 2000 (VS)

30.ix: BLACK EAGLE 2; BROWN SHRIKE hrd; YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL 2; LARGE-CROWNED LEAF WARBLER 4.

Rishi Valley 2000 (VS)

1.vi: BAYA PRB, 10-15 N under const.

18: KOEL POB, in song; BROWN FLYCATCHER hrd; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, in song.

21: BROWN FISH OWL mobbed by 2 Treepies.

24: BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER PRB, pair excavating N-hole on coconut tree; ASHY PRINIA POB, in br., plm; BAYA POB, courting, 20+ N; BLACK-HEADED MUNIA 20+ on OH wires.

25: BROWN FLYCATCHER 1 juv, FRANKLIN'S PRINIA POB, in br., plm.

29: WHITE-BROWED BULBUL CB, incubating.

2.vii: SPOTTED MUNIA POB, ad., entering N.

5: BROWN FLYCATCHER 2 ad., 1 juv.

15: IORA PRB, song and disp.; THICK-BILLED FLOWERPECKER 1 (scarce in Rishi Valley).

16: ASHY-CROWNED FINCH-LARK PRB, disp.; RED-RUMPED SWALLOW PRB, Bird carrying wet mud to N under const.; BRAHMINY MYNA CB, carrying food in bill; INDIAN ROBIN CB, carrying food in bill.

22: BRAHMINY KITE 1 (uncommon).

23: SCAVENGER VULTURE 1 (uncommon).

2.viii: SHIKRA; TREEPIE; PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD. All feeding on winged termites.

3: BONELLI'S EAGLE pair.

5: BAYA CB, 35+ active N.

6: PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1F.

11: ALPINE SWIFT 7.

22: TAWNY EAGLE pair disp., in flight; COMMON SWALLOW 2.

27: ALPINE SWIFT 4.

2.ix: SCAVENGER VULTURE 1.

5: GOLDEN ORIOLE hrd.

6: SMALL GREEN-BILLED MALKOHA PRB, pair mating. M offered F a tiny caterpillar as nuptial gift; GREY WAGTAIL 1.

8: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 juv., without long tail & crest, with flock of White-headed Babbler.

10: LARGE PIED WAGTAIL PRB, with N-mat.

16: GREENISH LEAF WARBLER hrd; FOREST WAGTAIL hrd.

23: PITTA hrd.

24: BLACK DRONGO in tail moult; LESSER WHITETHROAT 2.

25: BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER hrd (uncommon in Rishi Valley).

2.x: KOEL CB, yng begging food from House Crow.

7: HAIR-CRESTED DRONGO hrd.

8: GREY DRONGO 3.

9: LITTLE BROWN DOVE PRB, courting and calling; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1M.

10: BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1.

13: GREY HORNBILL 1; RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER.

14: BLUE-THROATED FLYCATCHER hrd.

15: KESTREL 2; HARRIER (unidentified species) 1; LITTLE BROWN DOVE CB, 1 N in *Acacia* sp.; YELLOW-EYED BABBLER POB in song; COMMON BABBLER CB, feeding yng that was begging. Aggressively chases away a Brown Shrike; WHITE-THROATED MUNIA PRB, pair carrying N-mat., to *Acacia* sp.

23.xi: BROWN FISH OWL hrd.

9.xii: BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER 1; BLACK-NAPED MONARCH hrd; INDIAN TREE PIPIT *Anthus hodgsoni* 8; GREY WGTAIL 35+ on OH wires; ROSEFINCH 50+.

10: BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER 1.

31: BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER hrd.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills 1.ii (AP)

MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, M singing from tree-tops.

CIEFL Campus (10.i) (JVDM)

BARN OWL; GREY HORNBILL 2.

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park

4.x.2000 (SU): WHITE-BREASTED MUNIA CB, ad., feeding yng.

5: INDIAN MOORHEN CB, 1 ad., + 2 yng; STONE CURLEW 3.

29.i.2001 (BH): BOOTED WARBLER 10; YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus 29.i (BH)

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK F imm; HEN HARRIER F; SHORT-EARED OWL 1; RUFOUS-TAILED SHRIKE *Lanius isabellinus* imm. (New record for A.P.); COMMON CHIFFCHAFF 2; GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK 200+.

10-11.ii (BSAP members): PAINTED STORKS CB, birds on N, incubating; DUCKS *Anatidae* 3,000+; HARRIER sp. 300-400 roosting; SHORT-EARED OWL 2.

Patancheru: Chintalacheruvi village 12.i (SU,JK)

WHITE IBIS 40; WHITE-NECKED STORK 2.

NELLORE DISTRICT

Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary 25.xii.2000 (VS)

INDIAN SHAG 6; GREY PELICAN 3 (no N due to low water level); NIGHT HERON 50+ ad., & juv; OPENBILL STORK CB, (12 N) 100+ birds; WHITE IBIS 10.

Pulicat Bird Sanctuary 24-25.xii.2000 (VS)

GREY PELICAN 100+; GREATER FLAMINGO 8000+; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 150+; BLACK-TAILED GODWIT 100+.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Chevella (RM)

15.i: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 2 from halted train.

Gangaram Tank (SAK)

18.i: PURPLE HERON 1; WHITE-EYED POCHARD 15; COTTON TEAL 150+; COOT 200+. CB, some with yng; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 7 non-br plm; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA CB, 13 ad., 5 imm.

WARANGAL DISTRICT

Kazipet Lake 24.xii.2000 (MSK,KV)

YELLOW BITTERN CB, 1 yng; PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 5 yng; BRAHMINY MYNA CB, 50+ yng; WHITE-THROATED MUNIA CB, 4 yng.

KERALA

ERNAKULAM DISTRICT

Kochi 21-23.iv.2000 (VS)

LITTLE CORMORANT PRB, N under const; NIGHT HERON CB, N on Mango *Mangifera indica*, yng out of N; KOEL POB singing; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB singing.

Trivandrum city 24-30.iv.2000 (VS)

KOEL POB, in song; LESSER GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER PRB, pair at cavity in *Embelica* sp.; JUNGLE MYNA pair at woodpecker N; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, in song; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm.

KANNUR DISTRICT**Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary 9-11.iii.2000 (VS)**

BLUE-WINGED PARAKEET C; BROWN-BREASTED FLYCATCHER C; WHITE-BELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER 3-4; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL CB, 1 N, ad., feeding through slit; YELLOW-BROWED BULBUL CB, ad., feeding juv.; SMALL SUNBIRD PRB, carrying N-mat.; RUBY-THROATED BULBUL C; QUAKER BABBLED C; LARGE GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER drumming; HILL MYNA C; BAY-BANDED CUCKOO hrd; BROWN HAWK-OWL hrd; GREY-FRONTED GREEN PIGEON 50-60 on fruiting *Ficus* sp.; GREY-HEADED BULBUL; EMERALD DOVE CB, N in small tree. Bird incubating. Also 8-10 birds together on mud road; FAIRY BLUEBIRD C; SLATY-HEADED SCIMITAR BABBLED hrd; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH hrd; BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE 1; MALABAR TROGON C, in pairs, hrd; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER; LARGE HAWK-CUCKOO 1; WHITE-BELLIED TREEPIE hrd; WHITE-RUMPED SPINETAIL 3; BLACK-CRESTED BAZA 3; RUFOUS-TAILED FLYCATCHER; BLUE-HEADED ROCK THRUSH 2M; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER hrd; CRESTED GOSHAWK CB, N with eggs;

Madras Crocodile Bank 6-11.x.2000 (SAT)

BRAHMINY KITE 1 juv; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 1; FOREST WAGTAIL 5.

COIMBATORE DISTRICT**Coimbatore: Kuruchi Tank 23.xii.2000 (SAK)**

GREY PELICAN 4; COMMON TEAL 200+; SPOTBILL 56.

KANCHEEPURAM DISTRICT**Nannamangalam Reserve Forest 5.xi.2000 (VS)**

GREAT HORNED OWL 3; ORANGE-HEADED GROUND THRUSH 1 & ORANGE-HEADED (WHITE-THROATED) GROUND THRUSH 1, 7seen together.

NILGIRIS DISTRICT**Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary: Masinagudi (SAK)**

24.xii.2000: BROWN-BREASTED FLYCATCHER; CHESTNUT-BELLIED NUTHATCH; SMALL SUNBIRD.

Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary: Ombetta (SAK)

26.xii.2000: GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 1M.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Bill Harvey (BH); Jagdish Kumar (JK); MS Kulkarni (MSK); Ranjan Mathew (RM); S Ashok Kumar (SAK); Shafaat Ulla (SU); Siraj A Taher (SAT); V Santharam (VS).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

TAMIL NADU**CHENNAI DISTRICT****Pallikaranai Marsh 5.xi.2000 (VS)**

PURPLE HERON 2; OPENBILL STORK 150+ in flt; PURPLE MOORHEN 10+; CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER hrd.

CHINGLEPUT DISTRICT**LITERARY WRENDITIONS**

"These so-called pelagic birds—the albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters, storm-petrels, skuas, jaegers, and a few shorebirds, among others—spend almost their entire lives over water. Unlike pelicans, cormorants, and most gulls, which haunt coastal waters but return toward land each night to roost, the pelagics may wander thousands of miles from shore, spending years at a stretch of sea. When a young black-footed albatross, hatched on Midway Island in the Hawaiian chain, opens its seven-and-a-half-foot wings and lumbers into flight for the first time, it will not touch ground again for three years, during which it wanders the Pacific from Japan to the Aleutians, and south as far as Mexico...

"Spending months a sea raises a significant difficulty for pelagic birds: finding something to drink. Seawater is saltier than the bird's own blood, so much so that drinking a quart of ocean water requires a quart and a half of freshwater to flush out the toxic salts—a quick route to death by dehydration. But tubenoses, gulls, and many other seagoing birds have specialized glands, located above each eye, which filter excess salt from the bloodstream, expelling it down the nostrils. They have perpetually runny noses, from the endless drip of concentrated salt that trickles down their beaks."

—Weidensaul, Scott (2000): *Living on the Wind. Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*. Pp. 420. North Point Press, New York.

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

PROGRAMME

Indexed Papers 24.3.2001

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098), Aasheesh (3350683) or, Siraj (6612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis.

Sunday, 18-iii-2001: Manjira Barrage, Medak District: The main attraction at Manjira is a heronry (reached by boat) of Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (c. 500 birds last year) and Openbill Stork *Anastomus oscitans*. Other attractions include a wide variety of waterfowl and perhaps a Mugger Crocodile *Crocodylus palustris* or two. Route: Panjagutta-Patancheru-Sangareddi-Manjira Barrage. Distance is about 60km from the city. Members are requested to assemble at the Environment Education Center at Manjira by 8am. Carry water and lunch if you plan to stay for the day. For directions contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

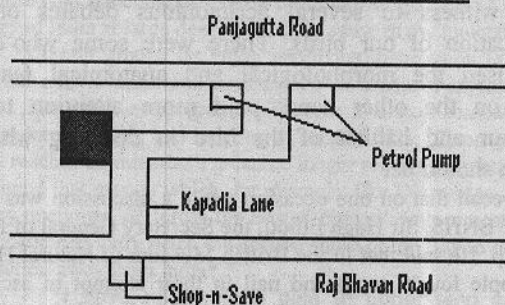
INDOOR MEETING: 19-iii-2001, 6 p.m.: Illustrated talk by Dr C. Tom Hash on birdwatching in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh. Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP Blast!

BSAP is arranging an evening of fun, frolic and food for members, family and friends, at 7pm on 24 March 2001, at the residence of Sushil Kapadia. His house is on Kapadia Lane, between the two parallel main roads of Panjagutta-Khairatabad and Raj Bhavan Road. Moorty uncle is organizing games for children. Wholesome vegetarian food will be arranged. Contributory participation is Rs100 per head. Registration closes 20.iii.2001 though payment can be made on 24th evening. Cancellation of booking is not allowed for obvious reasons. For information contact Sushil Kapadia (R: 3393968 O: 4756798 or Rajeev Mathew (R: 3310721 O: 3754854). Please participate whole-heartedly with family and friends and make the event a mega success.

Road Map to Sushil Kapadia's house



New owl species from Sri Lanka

"A previously unknown bird, a new resident species of owl, has been discovered in Sri Lanka.

"The discovery of a new species is a major event in world ornithology. There have been several in the last few decades. Most of these have been in little-explored and poorly-studied areas or localities of the world.

"The bird life of Sri Lanka has been thoroughly investigated and classified by foreign (mainly British) ornithologists up to the 1940s, by means of large-scale shooting and collecting, and thereafter by other ornithological surveys from time to time and by bird-watchers, up to the present. The last discovery of a bird species in the island before this was 132 years ago, of the endemic Ceylon Whistling Thrush (popularly known as the Arrenga) by Samuel Bligh in 1868.

"The new discovery was made by Deepal Warakagoda, renowned field ornithologist and Sri Lanka's leading wildlife sound recordist, on 23 January 2001.

"On that day in a wet-zone forest he finally saw the bird, which he had been trying to track down by its call for several years. As soon as he sighted it his idea, which he had formed from the call, was confirmed, that it was an owl very different from those hitherto known in Sri Lanka. He showed it to bird-watcher Ed Hagen of the U.S.A who was with him. He soon located the bird at another site accompanied by wildlife photographer Chandima Kahandawala, who took this photograph among others, the first ever of the species. With them were Nanda Senanayake, chairman of the Ceylon Bird Club, and Udaya Sirivardana. Warakagoda is the club's Joint Secretary and the other two members of it.

"The photographs, Warakagoda's detailed descriptions and his audio recordings of the calls were studied by Dr Pamela Rasmussen of the U.S.A, a leading authority on the

ornithology of our region. She has stated that it is a previously unrecognised species and almost certainly new to science. She confirms his belief that it belongs to the genus *Otus*. Further studies are being carried out by him in collaboration with her to determine the taxonomy, distribution, ecology and biology of this owl. Formal scientific naming of the new species awaits completion of detailed morphological studies by the team.

"The new owl is an addition to the endemic bird species of Sri Lanka and is the second owl among them. The other is the Chestnut-backed Owlet, discovered in 1846. It is noteworthy that of the 12 species of owl which are now known to occur in the island these two endemics have been the last to be found in it." [Press release from Kithsiri Gunawardena, Joint Secretary, Ceylon Bird Club, downloaded from orientalbirding@yahoo.com Date: Sunday, February 25, 2001 3:51 PM]

Interesting species for Andhra Pradesh

Aasheesh Pittie

The past four months have seen an exciting streak of bird records from Andhra Pradesh. Shantaram started it with his sighting of the Blue-bearded Bee-Eater *Nyctiornis athertoni* (Pitta # 118, p. 1) on 9.xii.2000 at Rishi Valley, Chittoor District. Bill Harvey (Pitta # 118 p. 7) continued it with his sighting of the immature Isabelline Shrike (Rufous-tailed Shrike) *Lanius isabellinus* at ICRISAT Campus on 29.i.01. Bill also reported seeing on that day, a Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and the Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* from the same area. Pranay Juwadi photographed a Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* being mobbed by crows in the Chevella area, Rangareddi District on 12.ii (see p. 7). Not to be left behind, Colin Conroy followed suit from Machilipatnam with his record of Grey-headed Lapwings *Vanellus cinereus* (see p. 6) on 17.ii and more, subsequently (pers. comm.) and, members of BSAP saw a male Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis* at Anantgiri Reserve Forest, Rangareddi District during their field trip on 25.ii. Such extensions in the distribution ranges of species or the additions of species to the lists of various states/areas will be more evident in the future as the number of alert, record-keeping birdwatchers increases in our country. May their tribe increase!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2001:

Corbett National Park iv-v. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. viii-ix. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka xi-xii.

Bangalore Field Club of Bangalore: Birdwatching outing every 2nd Sunday of every month. Meet at Lalbagh Glass House, 0730hrs. For details contact JN Prasad at Tel: 91-

80-664 4682 / 6653350. Fax: 91-80-665 3350. Mobile: (0) 98440-07351. E-mail: jnprasad@usa.net.

9-12.v.2001: *Third International Hornbill Workshop*, Phuket, Thailand. For more information contact Secretariat, Dr. Pilai Poonswad, Hornbill Research Foundation, c/o Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Rama 6 Road, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. Tel: +662-246003 extn 4606. Fax: +662-6445411. E-mail: scpps@mucc.mahidol.ac.th.

August 2001: *Asian Wetland Symposium 2001*, Penang, Malaysia. Further details at: E-mail: Dr. Taej Mundkur taej@wiap.nasionet.net. Website: <http://aws2001.domainvalet.com>.

25-28.ix.2001: *Australian Ornithological Conference*, Charles Stuart University, Bathurst, NSW, Australia. Website: <http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001>. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

11-17.viii.2002: *23rd International Ornithological Congress (IOC)*, Beijing, China. For more information contact the IOC at E-mail: infocenter@ioc.org.cn or Website: <http://www.ioc.org.cn/>. Deadline for submission of contributed papers is 1 July 2001.

19-22.ix.2002: *Vth International Parrot Convention*, Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife, Spain. Ms. Inge Feier, Directora, Loro Parque Fundación, 38400 Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Espana. Tel: +34-922-374081 Fax: +34-922-375021. E-mail: dir.general@loroparque-fundacion.org. Website: www.loroparque-fundacion.org.

Errata: Pitta # 118 p. 1 Notes & News, line 2, *Nycticorax athertoni* should read *Nyctiornis athertoni*.

CONTACT CALLS

"I was amused to see in a recent article by Kumar Ghorpadé that Sálím Ali was not a taxonomist. It would have been more correct to say that he was far more than a taxonomist, an ecologist who takes all aspects of morphology, anatomy, etc., into account while deciding on the classification of birds.

"As Honorary Secretary of the BNHS for several years I was witness to several acrimonious debates on the classification of our birds. There were some who over-emphasised the morphological and anatomical features. Salim, on the other hand, paid more attention to the behaviour and habitat of the bird in deciding what its position should be.

"I recall that on one occasion while a discussion was going on at the BNHS, Sir Hugh Elliott, the Secretary General of IUCN, turned up. He said that in the British Museum of Natural History also people fought tooth and nail in their attempt to ascribe a specific or sub-specific status to a bird. Much of it he said was laughable because it was quite clear that if a bird's habitat was in the open it would have paler colours than if it was under forest cover. As an example he cited the Sind Crow which was found to have paler shadings than the one in Bombay entirely for climatic reasons.

...Continued on page 6

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—42

"...life has been modernized at a comparatively fast pace at least twice by massive Ice-Ages, once about 500 million years ago, a second time some 250-200 million years in the past (Permo-Carboniferous Glaciations). A third, and comparatively short-lived, Pleistocene Ice-Age [ca 70,000-10,000 years ago—K.G.] has beyond doubt contributed to the evolution of Man, and to the destruction of an enormous amount of life. This Age is by far too recent to be assayed in its effects and, above all, these effects have been largely interfered with by *Homo's* ascent to supremacy."

"...A fundamental principle of scientific reasoning (philosophers style it 'Principle of Parsimony' or Occam's Razor) requires that the simplest, most direct solution be endorsed as having in its favour the sum of probabilities."

"Some readers will remark that it is strange (see Fig. 8) that the same subspecies is distributed on both sides of the Bay of Bengal precisely as if this body of water were land, and wonder accordingly whether, after all, Vaurie may not have been the victim of some taxonomic error. If so, who is ever to decide as between the discrepant treatments by Vaurie and Ripley, who is not himself a past-master of Indian Ornithology? How can the biogeographer meddle in a question of the sort? And why insist on samples drawn from the annals of bird-life? Would it not be better to refer, for instance, to *Ficus*, of some other groups for which classification begins to be reliable at this hour?"

"The last end of this criticism can be disposed of without much trouble with two trenchant affirmations of fact, (1) *Biogeography is the very same for animals and plants alike*; (2) *The records of Ornithology have by now achieved a degree of completeness and standardization in matters of concepts, handling, etc., unequalled in other specialties whether zoological or botanical.*"

"As to the warning that a biogeographer sins by imprudence when meddling in learned arguments among specialists, I will answer that taxonomy at large is integral part of biogeography; meaning, that a student of dispersal, if versed in the generalities of classification, is thoroughly qualified to pass on the merits of an argument among specialists. The biogeographer will not undertake to judge whether, for instance, taxon A is a species 100% or only 51% *et similia*, but he will not be easily misled by strictly technical arguments."

"Lamentably, I cannot subject to stringent analysis and synthesis the whole of Vaurie's monograph of Dicruridae [1949, "A Revision of the Bird Family Dicruridae", *Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 93: 199-342—K.G.], which would be, no doubt, a rewarding undertaking in many respects..."

"...It should be difficult to show more clearly that Nepal is the boundary between what of life comes to the Himalayas either from the west and south (range: Afghanistan—Ceylon, in principle) or from the east and south (range: South China—Sundas)..."

"...The plain truth is that *the Bay of Bengal and its immediate southern approaches rate as a major node of the biogeography immediately involving Africa, (tropical) Asia, Malaysia, and Australasia*. Ancestral populations that 'coming in' from a base line in the Indian Ocean (of our map: call it 'Gondwana' or 'Lemuria' if you wish), do hit simultaneously the two Peninsulæ, Gangetic and Indochinese, and their insular appendages (Ceylon westward, the Greater Sunda, Malaya, the Nicobars and Andamans, etc., eastward) are, of course, bound in origin by common ties of consanguinity when allied at all. Indulging in time in differential form-making on both sides of the Bay of Bengal, these populations did establish eventually 'modern' species, subspecies, etc., in Ceylon, Kerala, the Sunda, etc. If the combinations of characters responsible for these taxa are clearcut, taxonomists will be in no doubt formally assigning them to different entities. If contrariwise, the combinations become clouded, and taxonomists will argue for ever whether the populations of, e.g., Ceylon and Kerala should, or should not, be assigned to the same subspecies, species, etc., endemic to Nepal, Assam, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Malaya, etc."

"...As this bay would be in late Cretaceous and Early Tertiary geography, ranked as a major biogeographical node, indeed, as a northern appendage of 'Gondwana' (already crumbled southward) at about the same epoch. Here again geologists' data assuring us that the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, etc., were until relatively late largely land is fully supported by objective (panbiogeographic) analysis. Earth and life evolve together, this being one of the basic principles of scientific biogeography."

"What is really needed to study the distribution of a taxon, is a *method of analysis of the facts of geographic distribution, eventually leading, through comparison of adequate numbers of patterns of distribution of plants and animals the world over, to the identification of the standard manner of operation of nature over space, through time, by form and form-making.*"

"...Geologist and biogeographer share in common a number of fundamental concepts (e.g., geosynclinal activity) and the naturalist who understands even a minimum of geology is never alone in his quests on dispersal. What Wadia (1953) says of the geology of India at large does make clear sense in my understanding..."

"...Certain groups do enjoy enormous distribution (so particularly the plants of water; another shred of evidence that the mangrove and its hinterland mark indeed the cradle of angiospermy), others on the contrary are quite narrowly localized..."

"...Naturally, every group will come to a stop somewhere, because: (1) every group is bound after all to a primary node of original form-making and massing (Croizat 1962); (2) no group has boundless genetic powers (Croizat 1958), therefore, sooner or later it reaches a limit where it can no longer release characters for renewed combination. In reference to truisms of the kind is easy to understand that groups which, for example, like Dicruridae or certain aggregates of *Ficus*, have the Indian Ocean for their theatre of primary operation, do 'cross the Bay of Bengal' with utmost ease. On the contrary, groups which like *Styphelia* have the Pacific for their cradle may only reach the eastern shore of the Bay in question 'on the overflow' out of some primary node of form-making and distribution away from India*."

"...I have never been able to understand why certain authors, (e.g. Hawkes & Smith 1965) erected 'continental drift' or the like into paragons of biogeography. Whether the Bay of Bengal came about because the Deccan and Indochinese Peninsula, respectively, did drift apart, or whether land once in between its current shores crumbled, is not a question to interest the student of dispersal very deeply. This student takes stock of the records of the geographic distribution of plants and animals, and *objectively* analyses them on a comparative basis, drawing the conclusions which the facts advise and commonsense endorses."

"...it is what Wadia (1953) identifies as the 'Tethyan geosynclinal tract of sea', commonplace of elementary geology. Resuming the 'Tertiary Systems' of India, Wadia (1953) writes, "The Tertiary era is the most important in the physical history of the whole Indian region, the Himalayas as well as the Peninsula. It was during these ages that the most important face-features of the area were acquired, and the present configuration of the country was outlined. With the middle of the Eocene, an era of earth movements set in

which materially altered the old geography of the Indian region. Two great events of geodynamics stand out prominently in these readjustments; one the final breaking up of the old Gondwana continent by the submergence of large segments of it underneath the sea, the other the uplift of the Tethyan geosynclinal tract of sea deposits of the north into the lofty chain of the Himalayas..."

"...Biogeography at its broadest and deepest makes no sense whatever unless seen against the background of the geological tale of the aeons. The whole of the vicariant form-making in, e.g., birdlife in the Himalayas, Andes, etc., and of insect zoogeography in, e.g., the Alps (Croizat 1960) goes back to the very same geological and biological rudiments."

"...The principle of the matter in the simplest words is that, *climate is a limiting factor of distribution, but climate does not account in the very first place for distribution. Main massings, and vicariant form-making correlated with main or lesser massings are the keystones of geographic distribution; therefore, no correct explanation of dispersal is possible which, ignoring main massing and vicariant form-making, only stresses climate, and ecological factors to suit . . . Dispersal is orderly not disorderly, always as precise as clockwork in every one of its aspects, factors, etc.: therefore, analysable by proper comparative methods and constructive principles from generalities to details...*"

"Panbiogeography is not revolutionary. Two of its fundamental concepts, that is: (1) vicariant form-making, and (2) combination of characters; have been accepted long ago in the natural sciences as obvious and effective..."

"...It is accordingly clear that a genuine science of dispersal requires: (1) coherent thinking from generalities to details; (2) a factual method of enquiry based on the facts of the record first and foremost."

"...Earth, animals, plants all deploy together over space through time; therefore, the laws of dispersal are fundamentally the very same for cotton, rat, butterfly, etc. As the science primarily interested in these laws, biogeography is a basic biological discipline in its own right, not the tail-end of some other 'specialty'. Biogeography actively collaborates with geology, ecology, phylogeny, systematics, taxonomy, palynology, cytogenetics, etc., without losing its individuality as a philosophy of life in change over space through time."

"*Some authors do indeed, here and there in their works, figure out odds of dispersal along statistical lines of approach. The only trouble is that these odds are not figured on the basis of *actual* records of geographic distribution analysed in large quantities. They are predicated on the hypothetical background of the 'principle' that, given enough time, anything may happen. In proper biogeography, there is no substitute for facts digested in massive amounts, plant and animals the world over."

"(4) The Bay of Bengal is not the locus of imaginary 'migrations', etc., but one of the foremost biogeographic node of the Far East, Malaysia, Australasia, Africa."

"(5) Dispersal in the Indian Ocean (of our maps; northern rim of Gondwana in reality) is cardinal for a great deal of life today found distributed from Afghanistan to eastern Polynesia. Other life has the Pacific for its main focus, which may interest India, too."

"(6) Palaeo-ecological and phylogenetic investigations are required to which panbiogeography will open now the way. As a primary center of formation of mangroves and near-mangroves, the Bay of Bengal offers most propitious grounds to enquiries of the kind."

"What biogeography needs is of course—like the every other science—more facts. For the moment, we have more facts than we actually need to set our thinking aright. It is evident that naturalists arguing whether a certain Tortoise, Bird, Fig, etc., has 'migrated' from Burma to Travancore rather in Miocene than in Pliocene times, etc., without at the same time: (1) having a definite understanding of vicariant form-making; (2) relying on an adequate perception of the geology of India; (3) being aware that phytogeography and zoogeography built on 'chance', 'casual means,' etc., are unworkable; will never put on paper conclusions worth mentioning. It is the inherent quality of our thinking—not the mass of facts within which we happen to be lost—which determines the standard of our answers to the problems of nature."

[Leon Croizat, 1968, "The Biogeography of India: a Note on some of its fundamentals", Proceedings of the Symposium on recent Advances in Tropical Ecology, Benares Hindu University, Varanasi, Part II, pp. 555, 557, 567-568, 574-578, 586-588.]

Jurassic epoch to the Pleistocene, some 200 million years of evolution of our Planet Earth, is the duration of the 'tale' of the feathered bipeds that we all adore as the birds we love to watch and photograph/paint, and about whom some of us also find time to write about. For hard-core evolutionary biologists, birds are reptiles, 'cousins' of crocodiles and their lot, but are much more agreeable to us humans than the latter taxon, because of their attractive attire, their ability to fly, and their recent acquisition of a melodious voice. The science of Biogeography tries to understand and document the evolution of their biodiversity, and their alleged 'migrations', or movements across space over time.

While putting together some 600-plus citations of papers and books on Biogeography of the Oriental Region (Ghorpadé, 1997, Indian Journal of Biodiversity, 1: 141-169), when Dave Pearson and I were postulating the geographic distribution and ecological history of Tiger Beetles of our sub-continent (1989, Journal of Biogeography, 16: 333-344), I remember going completely 'bonkers', and nursing a 'guilty conscience', after publishing a preliminary, much less-than-true analysis of this subject in that paper. From then on, all my reading of relevant literature failed to convince me, and my 'instinct', that anybody had even gotten close to a truthful understanding of our region's biogeography. Not Sunderlal Hora nor any of his compatriots, including Sálím Ali, subscribing to his "Satpura hypothesis", not Humayun Abdulali who had suggested an alternative "Eastern Ghats route" as more plausible than the Satpuras—Sahyadris one, not Dillon Ripley with his ideas of "Double invasions", not V.M. Meher-Homji and his better-than-most postulations of our phytogeography, and not even Professor Emeritus M.S. Mani, who has looked at this dilemma more holistically than most others, I believe.

After I was posted a bad photocopy of Leon Croizat's 47-page, 15-figure contribution, to a Symposium on Tropical Ecology held at Benares (Varanasi in native tongue) and published as an obscure 'Proceedings' not known to many biologists, it has taken me several years and many readings of it to realize that this paper, quoted by me synoptically above, is the best elucidation of the fundamentals of our sub-continent's biogeography. Croizat, a Venezuelan 'Latin American', is largely credited with the "Panbiogeography" approach and which I am now beginning to think is perhaps the most believable endeavour towards a logical understanding of this fascinating Science.

Future 'Letters' of mine this year will deal with the credibility of Croizat's fundamentals of our Old World Regions' biogeography. Several careful readings of my 'precis' of his paper presented above will prepare you for following my lead into the real facts of what I believe is the true history of our avifauna's origin and dispersal over this 'sub-continent', which is both very ancient, but also recent, and still evolving.

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

SPOTLIGHT: Black-crested Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

The Black-crested Baza is a sleek black and white hawk with a long black crest. Its head, neck, crest, upper plumage, rump, abdomen, thighs and tail coverts are glossy black. There are white and chestnut patches on its flight feathers. The upper breast is black while on the lower breast there is a broad white band followed by a chestnut one. Its belly is purplish-brown and buff-banded. Its legs are dirty green and the bill is horny-grey. In flight it shows broad rounded wings, black belly with pale underside of tail, banded underparts and white breast band which are leading pointers to this hawk's identification. As in most birds of prey, the female is larger than the male.

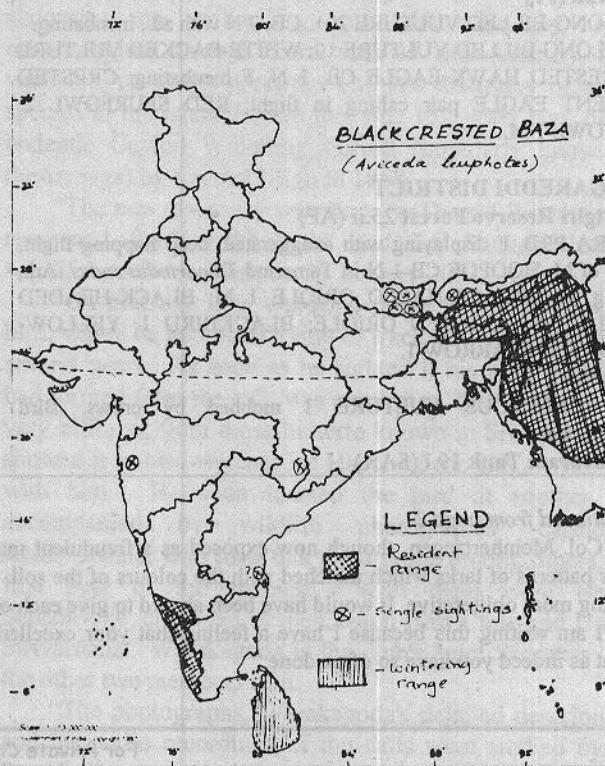
Two races are recognised. The nominate race, Indian Black-crested Baza (*Aviceda leuphotes leuphotes*) and the Burmese Black-crested Baza (*A. l. syama*). Races can be distinguished as the nominate race has a rufous and chestnut band *contra* a wholly black one in *syama*. The nominate race is found all over Kerala and western Karnataka and often a big gap in the whole of central India and beyond, in the northeast of the country in eastern Nepal, Sikkim, West Bengal, Bangladesh, Assam and some other northeastern states; whereas the Burmese race is found to breed in Myanmar, Assam, lower eastern Himalayas and Thailand. Very little is known of the separation of races in their respective areas and the distribution pattern is very hazy. Many reports indicate overlapping of races in some areas and the wintering population in Sri Lanka is supposed to be the east Himalayan race, *syama*.

Like the Blyth's Baza, the Black-crested Baza is also very rare and due to the paucity of skins and data, the distribution of races, both in southwest India as well as in northeast, is unclear. The large intervening gap in all of the rest of India is also puzzling. Occasional stray sight records, both historical and recent, suggest that this is a very rare bird in India and uncommon even in its range. More studies need to be made to ascertain the distribution of the two races in both the zones where these hawks occur—in south India, there are a few historical records from Tamil Nadu and one from near Nellore town in Andhra Pradesh. Of course, there are more records, both historical and recent from Kerala, Karnataka and northeast India.

From what little is known of its habitats, habits and behaviour, it is partly crepuscular (active at dusk and dawn) bird and it avoids the glare of the mid-day sun. It is

normally seen alone or in small parties. Perched in the canopy of tall trees, it makes aerial sorties at flying insects, settling down in some branch of another tree. This seems so like the bee-eaters or shrikes. Other items of food consist of lizards, large grasshoppers and other large insects, mantises and sometimes, small birds and bats. Its habitat is in tall evergreen forests, foothills and broken plains up to about 1,000m a.s.l. Its call is similar to that of a Pariah Kite or sometimes like a cat's "mewing." The breeding season as has been so far noted is from April-June in northeast India and February-July in south India, but mainly March-April. The nest is a platform of sticks with a large depression in the middle and lined with grass, soft materials and soft green leaves. In this nest, 2-3 greyish-white, smooth, oval-shaped eggs are laid. Both sexes incubate but the period of incubation is not known.

Outside their range, the sightings have been few and far between and all such records may be treated as vagrant, except maybe in places adjacent to the known distribution zones. Being a forest species, even their numbers are not known.



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

KRISHNA DISTRICT

Gudiwada (CC)

31.i: OPENBILL STORK c. 15; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1.

Machilipatnam (CC)

23.i—5.ii: BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER C in mangroves; TEREK SANDPIPER 1 on coast; WESTERN REEF HERON c. 40-50 dark phase birds in mangroves; LITTLE HERON few in mangroves; YELLOW BITTERN 3; OPENBILL STORK c. 15 in mangroves; PIED MYNA C near town; JUNGLE BABBLER.

17.ii: SPOTTED SANDPIPER; COMMON SANDPIPER; LITTLE STINT; PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER 8; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER; GREY-HEADED LAPWING 12; RED-WATTLED LAPWING.

6.iii: PURPLE HERON; BLACK BITTERN 2; YELLOW BITTERN 2; BLACK-WINGED STILT; PURPLE MOORHEN; INDIAN MOORHEN; WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA; HOPOE; BROWN SHRIKE; ASHY WREN-WARBLER; STREAKED WEAVER BIRD CB, Nesting; BAYA non-br plm.

Uppalapadu 22.ii (KHR)

GREY PELICAN 102, CB 40 N.

MEDAK DISTRICT

Toopran (PJ)

7.ii: LONG-BILLED VULTURE 20+. CB, 3 N with ad., incubating.

25.ii: LONG-BILLED VULTURE 10; WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 4; CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE CB, 1 N, F incubating; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE pair calling in flight; RED SPURFOWL 2; PEA FOWL 1 M.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantgiri Reserve Forest 25.ii (AP)

SHIKRA PRB, F displaying with exaggerated, deep flapping flight, ahead of M; HOPOE CB 1 N in Tamarind *Tamarindus indus*. Ad., feeding yng. BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE 1 M; BLACK-HEADED ORIOLE 1 M; GOLDEN ORIOLE; BLACKBIRD 1; YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW 1.

Chevela (PJ)

12.ii: CINEREOUS VULTURE 1 mobbed by crows. Bird photographed.

Gangavaram Tank 19.i (SAK)

WHITE-EYED POCHARD 75; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 7 Non-br., plm; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA 8 ad., 5 yng.

Hyderabad city outskirts (PJ)

14.ii: BONELLI'S EAGLE CB. Ad., feeding yng.

Ramoji Film City (PJ)

16.ii: BONELLI'S EAGLE CB, 1 N on pylon; SCAVENGER VULTURE CB, 1 N on cliff.

KERALA

MALAPPURAM DISTRICT

Irumbuzhi (ZAP)

1.iv.2000: MAGPIE-ROBIN PRB, carrying N-matl.

13.v: JUNGLE MYNA CB, N on Shami tree.

10.x: PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, pair mating.

13.x: PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, const., N.

18.x: WHITE-BACKED MUNIA PRB, with N matl.

20.x: GOLDEN ORIOLE 1 M, first for the winter.

24.i.2001: WHITE-BACKED MUNIA CB, ad., feeding 2 yng.

4.ii: RUFOUS BABBLER.

20.ii: JERDON'S CHLOROPSIS CB, ad., near begging yng.

27.ii: PITTA 1.

PALAKKAD DISTRICT

Nelliampathi Hills 28.iv—2.v (ZAP)

MALABAR PIED HORNBILL; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL CB, 1 ad., with 2 yng; WHITE-BELLIED TREEPIE; BLUE-WINGED PARAKEET.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Colin Conroy (CC); Pranay Juwadi (PJ); S. Ashok Kumar (SAK); Zaibin, AP (ZAP);

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

...Continued from page 2.

"Col. Meinhertzen, though now exposed as a fraudulent manipulator, did some interesting observations in Afghanistan on the colour patterns of larks which matched with the colours of the soil. This obviously helped them to protect themselves against predators by being more obliterative. It would have been absurd to give each of them a sub-specific status.

"I am writing this because I have a feeling that your excellent paper should carry more articles on the living bird in its natural habitat as indeed you have so often done."

—Zafar Futehally, Bangalore

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IP TTA



9/4
2001

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 120: April 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed 10/4/2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 22-iv-2001: Sanjivayya Park, Hyderabad city: Members are requested to reach the park entrance by 7.30am. Carry water and snacks. For directions and information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 16-iv-2001, 6 p.m.: Quiz by J.V.D. Moorthy. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Smithsonian Visionary Ripley Dies

Bart Barnes

(The Washington Post, 13 March, 2001)

Sidney Dillon Ripley II, 87, an explorer and ornithologist who led the Smithsonian Institution through an era of sweeping change and expansion as its secretary from 1964 until 1984, died of pneumonia yesterday at George Washington University Hospital.

...At Ripley's retirement, the Smithsonian had 4,500 employees and a \$250 million annual operating budget for attractions that drew more than 30 million visitors annually...

Sidney Dillon Ripley II was born in New York on Sept. 20, 1913. His father was a Manhattan stockbroker, and his great-grandfather was Sidney Dillon, the first board chairman of Union Pacific Railroad who in the 1870s acquired 2,000 acres in Litchfield. The future secretary of the Smithsonian spent part of his boyhood there, in addition to New York and Europe. At age 10, he diverted a brook to create his first duck pond on the Litchfield property, and the estate remained one of his primary residences throughout his life.

It was also around the age of 10, while playing in the Tuileries garden in Paris, that he began to develop his philosophy of museum management. One minute he would be riding on the carousel, the next watching a "Punch and Judy" show or running down paths of chestnut trees, and a few minutes later wandering through the galleries of the Louvre...

He studied history at Yale, and for a time he considered becoming a lawyer or an actor. Instead, he decided to "abandon all thoughts of a prosperous and worthy future and to devote myself to birds, the subject I was overpoweringly interested in."

In fact, Ripley's interest in birds had been growing since he was 11 or 12 at a boarding school in Massachusetts. A local clergyman used to take him on bird walks, he recalled, and he developed the fascination that remained with him for the rest of his life.

Soon after graduating from college, Ripley took his first major birding trip, an 18-month expedition to the South Seas aboard a 59-foot schooner. He spent almost a year with the Karoon cannibals of New Guinea, and he returned from his travels with 1,300 rare birds for museums and dealers. Later, he explored parts of Nepal never before seen by Westerners, and he

found a specimen of a bird -- the spiny babbler -- that had been lost to science for a century.

He received a doctorate in zoology from Harvard and was assistant curator of birds at the Smithsonian for three months while working on his doctoral thesis. In 1942, he joined the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA, which sent him back to Southeast Asia.

Most of his World War II duty was in India, Burma and Thailand, with occasional trips to China, where his future wife, Mary Moncrieffe Livingston, was assigned as an OSS officer. They were married in 1949 and she subsequently accompanied him on ornithological expeditions all over the world. She died in 1996.

After the war, Ripley joined the faculty at Yale, where he became a professor of zoology, and, in 1959, director of Yale's Peabody Museum. He established a reputation in the scholarly community as an eminent zoologist and was the author of a dozen books on birds, wildlife and museums. His magnum opus was the 10-volume Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, which he wrote with Selim Ali (Sálim Ali)...

In September 1984, three days before his 71st birthday, Ripley retired. He was given the title of secretary emeritus and an office to continue his research, and he divided his time among Litchfield, Washington and occasional ornithological expeditions...

In 1985, Ripley was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. He had honorary degrees from 15 colleges and universities...[Extracts from a report on nathistory-india@lists.princeton.edu.]

BIRDING AT ANANTGIRI

Kiran Katikaneni

Anantgiri provides a perfect release after a demanding week of dawn-dusk work schedules. And to be here in the penultimate days of the fast fading winter gives a last chance to breathe in the fresh air of the woods. The trip also gives us a sneak preview of approaching summer. Anantgiri is firmly etched in my memory from an earlier trip and the 6km walk with my nephew and a friend of his last summer. Three ignorant novices couldn't acknowledge the presence of the

varied pot-pourri of passerines, but nevertheless enjoyed the walk on an overcast afternoon.

My induction into ornithology has evolved gradually over the past year, mellowing with each passing day. I find myself a more contented person now.

The drive to Anantgiri was splendid because of the freshly blacktopped surface and virtually no traffic. This has become ever more cherishable after exhausting experiences on the city roads. There were the usual sightings of the hitchhiking cattle egrets, soaring pariah kites and sallying black drongos. There were occasional white-breasted kingfishers too. Within sight of Chevella town 4-5 yellow-wattled lapwings were seen on the road. They seemed unperturbed by the speeding car and with a magnanimous gesture moved aside to give way—only to resume their road-blockade after we'd passed by.

On reaching the Anantgiri temple area, our parking place, a refreshingly different and unique-tasting cup of tea lifted our spirits. This definitely was a welcome change from the routine 'Irani chai' that the average Hyderabad gets to drink day in and day out. Well, for once every member agreed about the fine taste of tea before the more serious business of species identification could drift them apart.

Our birding started right there with admiration for the fast flying blossom-headed parakeets, overhead. There was a steep stone-strewn pathway from the temple's entrance, leading into the wooded valley. A member popular for his imitation of birds' calls and good quality pictures spotted a hoopoe's nest with nestlings in a tamarind tree. But he revealed this to a select few, thereby avoiding excessive intrusion into the world of responsible parenthood.

At this point all the members impulsively stopped at a fruiting fig tree. The variety and the number of birds visiting the tree was simply great. The species observed included crimson-breasted barbet, large cuckoo-shrike, common wood-shrike, grey hornbill, common and brahminy mynas, rose-ringed parakeets and yellow-footed green pigeons. The golden orioles' brilliant plumage shone against the background of red figs. The star of the show however, was a male black-naped oriole. Another highlight was the display flight of the large cuckoo-shrikes. An amusing sight was that of four quails (species?) scurrying into the dense undergrowth.

As we moved ahead, the children in the group spotted a lone grey wagtail flirting from one post to another in a large stepped well. Soon we noticed a male paradise flycatcher with his beautiful tail plumes. Everyone took time to thoroughly enjoy the sight. There was a raptor high above in the skies whose identity was concluded as a Bonelli's eagle.

Just before 'half-time', we stopped to see the nest of a resident pair of crested hawk-eagles. High in the fork of a eucalyptus tree, it was massive, suggestive of yearly additions. The pair was nowhere in sight. At our pit-stop under a banyan tree we spotted white-browed fantail flycatchers, magpie-robin, Tickell's blue flycatcher, shikra and a golden-backed woodpecker. The time was well spent in discussing the birds and sharing a few lighter moments. On the way back, on a blossom-covered tree there were black and white-bellied drongos and white-eyes.

At mid-day we halted for lunch at the deserted guest house of the A.P. Forest Department. Here we sighted a brown flycatcher among other species. The grand finale of the trip was a crested serpent eagle, majestically flying low over the treetops giving us enough time for gasps of admiration.

Joy and contentment filled our hearts as we departed, hopeful of another tryst with Anantgiri next year.

We welcome Mr Suresh Chand Sharma who has joined our team of referees for the column *Birding Notes*. He will referee notes for the states of Delhi and Haryana. He is an active member of the prolific mailing-list group, "Delhibirds."

Please **renew memberships** for the coming year/years. Annual and 3-year period Ordinary Memberships are accepted. We however urge members to consider taking a Life Membership of the Society. Changes in postal address, phone numbers or e-mails should be communicated to the Honorary Secretary.

70-odd members and guests had a wonderful time at the **BSAP bash** on 24.iii.2001. We thank Sushil and his family for having the party in their house and creating a unique ambience. Members were very appreciative of the idea and hoped that the 'bash' would become an annual affair!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2001:

Corbett National Park iv-v. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. viii-ix. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka xi-xii.

Bangalore Field Club of Bangalore: Birdwatching outing every 2nd Sunday of every month. Meet at Lalbagh Glass House, 0730hrs. For details contact JN Prasad at Tel: 91-80-664 4682 / 6653350. Fax: 91-80-665 3350. Mobile: (0) 98440-07351. E-mail: jnprasad@usa.net.

9-12.v.2001: Third International Hornbill Workshop, Phuket, Thailand. For more information contact Secretariat, Dr. Pilai Poonswad, Hornbill Research Foundation, c/o Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Rama 6 Road, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. Tel: +662-246003 extn 4606. Fax: +662-6445411. E-mail: scpps@mucc.mahidol.ac.th.

August 2001: Asian Wetland Symposium 2001, Penang, Malaysia. Further details at: E-mail: Dr. Taej Mundkur tajej@wiap.nasionet.net. Website: <http://aws2001.domainvalet.com>.

25-28.ix.2001: Australian Ornithological Conference, Charles Stuart University, Bathurst, NSW, Australia. Website: <http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001>. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

11-17.viii.2002: 23rd International Ornithological Congress (IOC), Beijing, China. For more information contact the IOC at E-mail: infocenter@ioc.org.cn or Website: <http://www.ioc.org.cn/>. Deadline for submission of contributed papers is 1 July 2001.

19-22.ix.2002: Vth International Parrot Convention, Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife, Spain. Ms. Inge Feier, Directora, Loro Parque Fundación, 38400 Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Espana. Tel: +34-922-374081 Fax: +34-922-375021. E-mail: dir.general@loroparque-fundacion.org. Website: www.loroparque-fundacion.org.

...Continued on page 7

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—43

"The late Dr. Salim Ali and I were fairly closely related, as part of a very intermingled and mixed-up Muslim family, originating in Gujarat but now scattered over many parts of the world. Our surname is the same Abdulali, but his section of the family had changed it to Abdul Ali and then to Ali..."

"Salim, some 18 years my senior, the youngest of uncle Moizuddin's children was unfortunately orphaned when quite young and brought up by another uncle. He failed to do well at school and after experiencing the oft-told story of the sparrow with the yellow throat and his first visit to the BNHS then housed in Phipson & Co's Office, he was in almost continuous touch with the Society. But the lack of a university degree* prevented him from obtaining a job. Finally he was employed by the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Bombay, as a Field Lecturer in Natural History. After a year or two, he went to Dr. E. Stresemann, in Berlin for an out-of-college course in Ornithology and spent some useful time at the Berlin University. He underwent courses in Systematic and Field Ornithology. He also picked up some German. When he returned to India, he discovered that the museum had abolished the post which he had held and Salim was again unemployed.

"His wife who had means of her own encouraged him to pursue his interests in the study of birds and wildlife..."

"...Salim obtained financial assistance for the ornithological survey of Hyderabad State. He invited me to join him in camp during my college holidays. I was able to do so for about a month, most of which was spent at Utnoor and Farahabad in Mahboobnagar District which was then really full of tigers (1931)... This was followed by another spell in Hyderabad and Travancore all within a year or two afterwards. I was also with him at a duck shoot in Bharatpur (1938?), a round trip to several sanctuaries in the Northeast and on many trips around Bombay either for snipe, duck or partridge, or just bird watching..."

"Salim knew Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India when before independence, they had lived in Dehra Dun at the same time. This contact was of use to him and also helped the BNHS in many ways.

"He had his own way of thinking and doing things. Being hard of hearing it was difficult to persuade him to change his mind—he would stop listening long before you had finished talking!

"On the professional side he was assisted by his excellent command of English and his genuine interest in Ornithology. He made extensive collections of birds in different parts of the country, but with the absence of any definitely named ornithological collections in India, he failed to name a single new bird himself although several have been named *salimalii* by others. His many books on Indian birds and the regional works following his surveys have been guiding lights in a period of darkness which came suddenly and unexpectedly with independence. It was indeed a privilege to have been associated with him and to secure his co-operation for so long."

*This degree and many other distinctions in cash and kind were conferred upon him by the Indian and other foreign governments and institutions.

[Humayun Abdulali, 1996, *Blackbuck* (Madras), 12: 90-92]

"While I have the highest of regards, nay affection, for the memory of Salim Ali, I think enough is enough. The best tribute we can pay him and others who strode the birdwatching campaigns of the earlier part of this century is to go out birding regularly..."

"...birds can be attracted to the neighbourhood by planting suitable 'bird trees' and 'bird climbers' around the home and along the streets. Several species of *Ficus* are great and I remember SA maintaining that a 'Peepal' or a Banyan each were mini sanctuaries."

"The greatest need of the times is to have more potential Salim Alis. Every child is one! So, while putting Salim Ali's portraits on pedestals—we all are good at that—how much more would it be fitting to generate conditions for young people to get infected by the outdoor bug?..."

[Lavkumar Khacher, 1996, *Blackbuck* (Madras), 12: 112]

King of Indian bird watchers, the "greatest" Indian ornithologist...and many such accolades and hero worship for the late Salim Ali, whose prefix "Doctor" was also a non-academically obtained 'gift of honour' to him. Although I myself accept that what this one man did with our bird study, even after independence, was stupendous and laudable, I believe that, as is our 'Indian' habit of sycophancy, he does not deserve this god-like worship if we evaluate his real efforts scientifically and objectively, taking also into consideration the labours of others who came before him and now succeed him, both native and foreign.

Zafar Futehally's comment in the March 2001 issue of *Pitta* (#119, pp. 2 & 6), about my not recognizing Salim Ali as a genuine taxonomist, must be replied to so there is no misunderstanding and misapprehension in the minds of bird watcher colleagues. It was natural that Zafar should rise to the "defence" of his wife Laeeq's uncle, and also throw at me the usual, oft-repeated, all-round ornithological efforts of his relation, by matrimony (see also *THE FALL OF A SPARROW*, p. 54). It is also true that one of the finest 'portraits' of Salim Ali's life and work was penned by Zafar and published in the *B.N.H.S. Journal* (71: 579-586, 2 pls.) in 1976. But, as I quote his cousin Humayun Abdulali and his friend Kunvar Lavkumar above, Salim Ali had no real academic training in Systematic Ornithology (except very briefly through Stresemann), neither did he ever do intensive research on bird taxonomy (except collect valuable specimens) to be able to master this specialty in his lifetime, which was in fact spent otherwise, studying bird 'ecology'—but I have again little knowledge of what specific bird ecology topics he did publish on, after his well known papers on our Baya and other Weavers, our flamingoes, and on our 'flower birds' and bird pollination. I must say, however, that I respect late Salim Ali for his singular devotion to our Ornithology and also for his humility in quickly accepting any faults of his, like saying insects were all destructive (not many cause us harm!), and also that birds were the chief 'controllers' of injurious insects (other insects themselves are!), and point to me in the gallery as his corrector, when he was delivering one of his many interesting, illuminating and uplifting talks which I had the privilege of attending. But, as a scientist I must be objective, and so I must therefore insist on clarifying what has become like a grandmother's bed-time tale to 'hero-worshipping' humans, and make known to you all another side of the real story of our wonderful Dr Salim Ali, whose autobiography *THE FALL OF A SPARROW* gives you a good idea of his personality and achievements.

Readers must understand that I am not belittling or questioning the ornithological 'sense' and achievements of Salim Ali, from whose writings and survey reports I learn a lot, but feel it very necessary to put his work in proper perspective and remove the 'halo' we have all put around him. Like Abdulali writes above, the three or four decades after our independence were difficult times for us 'free' Indians before we built the infrastructure and expertise that now undoubtedly exists. Vast tracts of forest were felled by timber contractors for finance that our country needed desperately, resulting in the destruction of a great amount of wildlife that these jungles had sustained, taking advantage of the end of legal protection to them that the British and Princely States' governments had enforced. At that time, it was only Salim Ali (who chose to remain in India and pursue his passion for ornithology and natural history, with all his financial and academic drawbacks) who carried the torch for wildlife biology and conservation. His lead inspired persons like Humayun Abdulali, Biswamoy Biswas, Lavkumar Khacher, V.C. Ambedkar, J.C. Daniel, V.S. Vijayan and others to continue research, and, persons like E.P. Gee, R.W. Burton, R.C. Morris, M. Krishnan and Zafar Futehally, etc., to strengthen the conservation

effort to help save a badly battered native flora and fauna from the euphoria and indiscipline 'freedom' that independence had gifted us (see THE FALL OF A SPARROW, p. 187). Jawaharlal Nehru, himself a lover of shikar and of nature, and a friend of Sálím Ali, helped constitute the "Indian Board for Wildlife" with the support of the nascent conservationist lobby of British sportsmen 'staybacks', some Indian Princes (my late uncle, the erstwhile Maharajah of Sandur, included), a sprinkling of native naturalists, the Inspector General of Forests M.D. Chaturvedi, and the Director of the Zoological Survey of India S.L. Hora. Where is this I.B.W. now and what has happened to the recommendations for protection of our wildlife, both inside and outside forest areas? And where are Sálím Ali's personal library and his meticulous field notes on our birds?

This aside on Sálím Ali, prompted by Zafar's spirited, but not really veracious, comments in the last Pitta number, is targeted to point out the limitations of even a 'great' like Sálím Ali and to bring into focus the inputs of hundreds of other equally (or lesser or greater) talented bird watchers who walked his sub-continent before or after him. This monopolistic, hegemonistic, 'hangover' from the princely and colonial centuries must be set right. One Sálím Ali, one Bombay Natural History Society, one Newsletter for Birdwatchers, one Tiger, one Tendulkar...no, that is not the way to go. To be able to understand and then protect or restore our biodiversity, we need diversity in our ranks and approaches as well. We now have several hundred institutions where biology (if not ornithology or other special subjects) is being taught and studied, and a few thousand birdwatchers who spend quite some time looking at birds if not in taking notes on their observations. Zafar's Newsletter began arriving at my home regularly since 1965, and Zafar himself 'pitched tent' in a portion of our family farm they purchased near Bangalore ten years later. He has been a great source of intellectual enlightenment on our birds through his periodical or otherwise, but now there are a few other 'newsletters' like Pitta itself which have 'opened shop' and are serving the ornithological community in our country. More natural history societies like the B.N.H.S. are badly required now in other parts of our country, if not B.N.H.S.' own regional stations like was proposed a few years ago but never materialized. The W.W.F.—India State Offices are doing good nature education work and conservation efforts, but is there any research being done on our wildlife by them? The B.N.H.S. journal is about the only regular periodical that publishes on our natural history and field biology but we desperately need more such subject-interest journals. Conservation effort without wildlife biology research back-up in each of these Protected Areas is bound to be unfruitful, unscientific, outdated and sterile. We need more field biology and ecology (and taxonomy!) taught in our schools and colleges and careers in wildlife management, nature education and scientific research created to sample, survey, document, understand, protect and restore our native flora and fauna. The several agricultural universities set up with help and training from United States of America sister-institutions from the 1960s (of which I am an early product) can deal with introduced or domestically bred plants and animals here. Additionally, the "Ecology of our agro-ecosystems" needs to be introduced as another subject taught to all B.Sc. (Agri.) students. And the forest colleges (many more needed) must teach silviculture, like was done at the Forest Research Institute at Dehra Dun before independence, besides wildlife management also now.

Both Sálím Ali and Zafar Futehally, among a few others (Burton, Gee, Krishnan) have written extensively on what needs to be done, but this fund of wisdom and experience, gained in years of still plentiful wildlife, seems to be unknown or out of reach (or mind?) of the contemporary "conservationists" of today, who are still trying to work out a "National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan" to protect our natural heritage. Other countries, especially the developed ones, have oceans of ideas and methodologies we can benefit from, with their help and advice, if we request it. Why wait and stumble along, devising our 'own' strategy, as if it is classified information or a guarded secret? Wildlife respects no national boundaries and does not 'belong' to any country's people or governments!

Sálím Ali's THE FALL OF A SPARROW has answers and replies to most questions on Indian Ornithology anyone may have. It is a book one can read over and over again for enjoyment, and also refer to for such answers with the help of its detailed index (I have supplemented this by adding more keywords and page numbers!). I will use his wonderful book to try and reassure Zafar that I am not totally wrong or disillusioned and that I try to write what I believe is quite true. On pages 57-61 and 195-196, Sálím Ali tells of his initiation into taxonomic research by E. Stresemann in Germany, using a sample of about 200 birds collected in Burma by J.K. Stanford, an ICS and a BNHS member. Claud Ticehurst, he writes, was then "outraged at the thought of an obscure greenhorn Indian trying to do so, and that too with the help of a naughty German". As far as I know, Sálím Ali's research on this Burmese sample was never published, if it was ever completed that is! Taxonomy needs a peculiar kind of intellect and application, which very few enjoy and revel in or master. Sálím Ali's decision to 'dump', as he wrote (p. 196) "morphology and taxonomy regarded as 'scientific' ornithology", and that his "own principal interest has centered on the living bird [emphasis mine—K.G.] in its natural environment, was, I believe, a carefully considered choice, based on his personal attitudes and interests. He went on to write—"I have bothered myself little with taxonomy except as a academic exercise". His choice, selection, brought still needed taxonomic studies on our birds to a painful grind, if not halt, after the departure of the British, but gave us plenty of biological and ecological data on our birds through Sálím Ali's field work. He depended on Whistler, Kinnear, Stresemann and then on Abdulali, Biswas and Ripley for taxonomic revisions and updates, but did he discuss species limits and of our birds with these colleagues and influence their decisions?

Taxonomy and classification are the bedrock of all life sciences and "acrimonious debates" are a healthy channel of solving problems and proving theories, that are falsified and redone as more material and databases come into play. Those who have little or no idea of the workings of taxonomy will find it very difficult (and 'boring' or 'amusing') to understand. I am however trying to re-evaluate our species limits and 'subspecies' and publish my results for other competent taxonomists to accept or falsify. Amateur bird watchers must, I believe, be involved and educated in this exercise, because it is critical for them also to recognize what good, reproductively isolated, individual life-cycle species are, and to separate them from the many many so-called 'subspecies' that remain "question marks" only because of insufficient data.

What is "the Sind Crow" (scientific name?) that Zafar mentions? Dark or light plumages are clinal or ecological and must not be confused with good species characters. See what Whistler wrote to Sálím Ali about bird plumage and soil colour in Larks (THE FALL OF A SPARROW, p. 244), which may or may not be congruous or connected. And, there's "more than meets the eye" about the "fraudulent manipulator" Meinertzhagen, I believe (see Sálím Ali's positive remarks about him in THE FALL OF A SPARROW). My

own research on Flies borrowed from the Natural History Museum in London has revealed mistakes in labelling by museum technical staff there, accidentally, or through ignorance of geographical names on original labels of the collector. I have not read the derogatory book about the Colonel who became Sálím Ali's close friend, but until then, I will not 'throw my hat into the ring.'

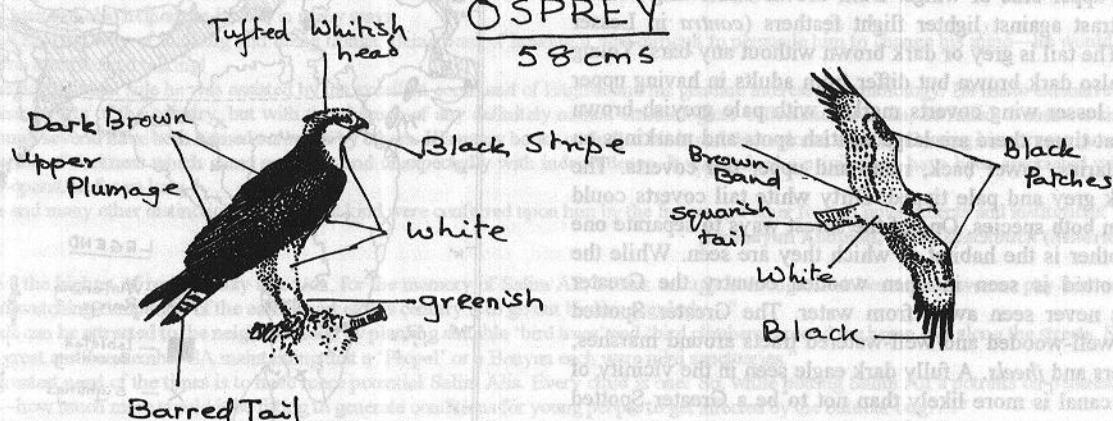
Finally, I will oblige Zafar and others, impatient and unhappy with my current Letters about the history, taxonomy and biogeography of our birds. I will later write about their biology, ecology, behaviour and evolution also which I hope will entertain and educate you all, besides alerting you to new ideas, approaches and theories. But, first things first. No roof without walls, and no walls without a solid, new foundation.

[Errata in Letter 41 in Pitta # 118—Page 3: 1st Quote, 2nd Para, 2nd Line should read "congenital"; Page 4: text Para 4, Line 9 should read "C. sriatus chersonesus". Letter 42 in Pitta # 119—Page 4: Text Para 2, Line 6 should read "Sunder Lal Hora".]

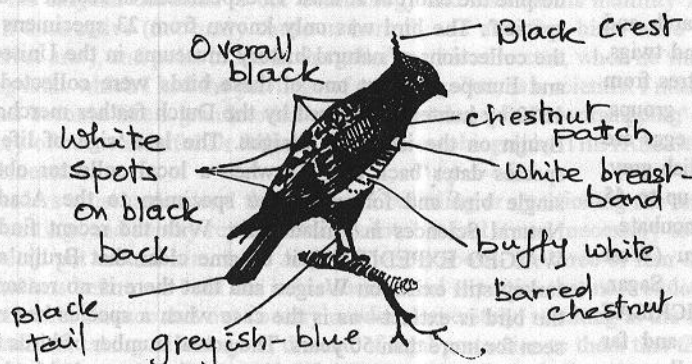
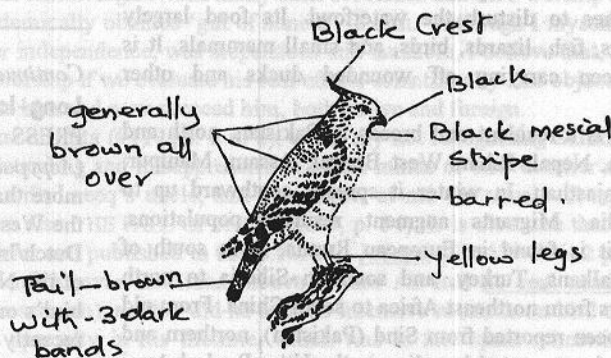
—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

OSPREY 58 cms



BLYTH'S BAZA 33 cms



BLACK CRESTED BAZA 46 cms.

SPOTLIGHT: Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

The genus *Aquila* consists of medium to large-sized eagles with moderately long and broad wings and a squarish or rounded tail. Their legs are fully covered with feathers and they have heavy and powerful beaks and talons. The Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) is a medium-sized dark blackish-brown bird with a slightly purplish gloss on its mantle. White is visible in the upper tail coverts. Minute white specks may be seen on the body, wings and tail owing to the fact that the base of all feathers is white. Feet are dull yellow with black talons and the bill is slaty with a black tip. In flight, two pale bands are visible on upper side of wings. Dark brown underwing coverts show contrast against lighter flight feathers (*contra* in Lesser Spotted). The tail is grey or dark brown without any bars. Young birds are also dark brown but differ from adults in having upper wings and lesser wing coverts marked with pale greyish-brown spots and at times there are large whitish spots and markings on the secondaries, lower back, rump and upper tail coverts. The tail is dark grey and pale tipped. Dirty white tail coverts could be found in both species. One of the surest ways to separate one from the other is the habitat in which they are seen. While the Lesser Spotted is seen in open wooded country the Greater Spotted is never seen away from water. The Greater Spotted frequents well-wooded and well-watered tracts around marshes, lakes, rivers and *jheels*. A fully dark eagle seen in the vicinity of a *jheel* or canal is more likely than not to be a Greater Spotted Eagle.

It is a sluggish bird with a heavy flight and can often be seen sitting for hours on a perch in a tall tree and then sailing over the marshes to disturb the waterfowl. Its food largely consists of frogs, fish, lizards, birds, and small mammals. It is occasionally seen carrying off wounded ducks and other gamebirds.

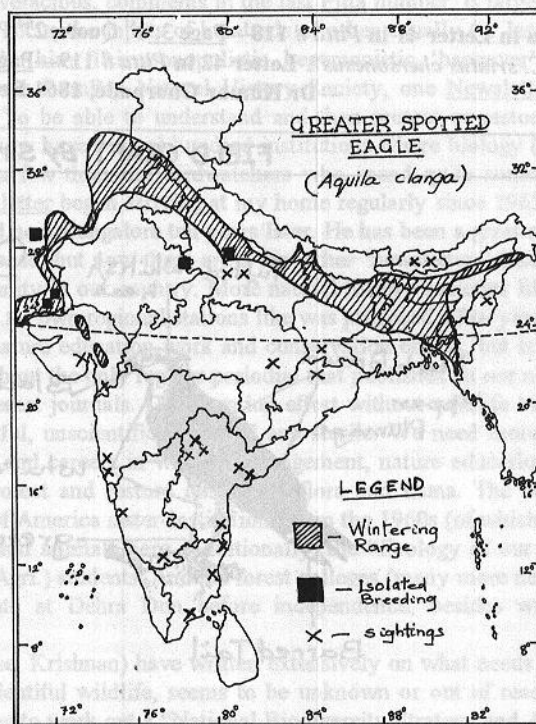
This eagle is a resident and breeds in Pakistan, north and northwest India, Nepal, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur, Gujarat and Rajasthan. In winter it spreads southward up to peninsular India. Migrants augment resident populations. Extraliminally it is found in European Russia, from south of 60°N to the Balkans, Turkey, and southern Siberia to north China. It winters from northeast Africa to south China. From old records it has been reported from Sind (Pakistan), northern and central India and even noted breeding in the Uttar Pradesh terai (Hume). Jerdon reported it as "common", from Mysore (Karnataka) and Malabar Coast (Kerala).

Breeding in India has been recorded between March and June. The nest is a massive round structure of sticks and twigs, lined with leaves, on top of tall trees usually 10-15 metres from the ground. Nests are either solitary or in small groups. Sometimes old nests are built upon. Usually 1-2 oval eggs are laid. These are sometimes spotted grey or reddish-grey. Incubation period has not been recorded but could be up to 45 days and like other birds of prey, only the female may incubate.

In Andhra Pradesh it has been seen at Kolleru (West Godavari District), Wadepalli (Warangal), Fox Sagar, Jeedimetla (Rangareddi) and very regularly at ICRISAT Campus, Patancheru (Medak). The sightings are few and far between and there is a paucity of data from almost all areas. Only one or two birds are seen at any place.

One of the main threats to this bird is the change in its ecological conditions due to the draining of marshes for

reclamation of land. Destruction of wooded areas and cutting of large trees is another reason.



Continued from page 2...

Long-lost megapode rediscovered on Indonesian island

PRESS RELEASE (6 March 2001): Bruijn's Brush-turkey (*Aepyodius bruijnii*) a bird which has not been recorded for more than 60 years, has been rediscovered on Waigeu, one of the West Papuan Islands (Indonesia). On 23 February 2001 the Dutch/Indonesian WAIGEO EXPEDITION led by Dr Kees Heij of the Natural History Museum Rotterdam got the proof of the bird's ongoing existence in their hands: the head and bones of a recently hunted and eaten specimen.

Bruijn's Brush-turkey is the only species of Megapode* which has never been observed alive by western scientists, despite the effort of at least 15 expeditions in search of this 'lost species'. The bird was only known from 23 specimens kept in the collections of natural history museums in the United States and Europe. All but one of these birds were collected around 1880 by hunters employed by the Dutch feather merchant A.A. Bruijn on the island of Waigeu. The last 'sign of life' of the species dates back to 1938 when a local collector obtained a single bird and forwarded the specimen to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. With the recent find by the WAIGEO EXPEDITION, it became clear that Bruijn's Brush-turkey still exists on Waigeu and that there is no reason to fear the bird is extinct—as is the case when a species has not been seen for more than 50 years. The actual number of birds that still survives on the island is unknown, but is probably less than 1000 individuals.

The rediscovery of Bruijn's Brush-turkey by Kees Heij and his expedition-team can be regarded as the long term result of

the WAIGEO EXPEDITIONS 1999 & 2000. These two expeditions not only surveyed parts of the almost inaccessible rugged and densely forested interior of Waigeu (total surface about 3200 sq. km.), but also supplied local people in villages all over the island with illustrations of the bird, urging them to report any sighting to the Indonesian counterpart of the WAIGEO EXPEDITION, Kris Tindige, who has an office in Sorong, the nearest town. This method yielded success: a pig hunter from Waigeu, whose dogs had caught and killed a rather large megapode, brought the head and bones (the leftovers of his meal) to Tindige who preserved the remains in alcohol and notified the expedition-members in Rotterdam. Kees Heij immediately mounted the WAIGEO EXPEDITION 2001 and—accompanied by Hans Post—travelled to Sorong. Based on studies of skins and mounted specimens of Bruijn's Brush-turkeys and other closely related megapode-species in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History (New York) and Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense (Java, Indonesia), Heij and Post could positively identify the head and bones as belonging to the long-lost *Aepyodius bruijnii* (OUSTALET, 1880).

The WAIGEO EXPEDITION 2001 will be on the island until about 15 March. Under guidance of the pig hunter Kees Heij, Hans Post and Kris Tindige will search the site where the bird was obtained. The moment that live Bruijn's Brush-turkeys will be observed, has never been so close. After the expedition, the head and bones of the 24th specimen will be temporarily stored for research in the Natural History Museum Rotterdam (the Netherlands). In the end, the long awaited proof of the species' ongoing existence will be deposited in the collection of the Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense, Indonesia's national zoological collection which is kept under perfect conditions in the new building at Cibinong, near Bogor, Java.

*Megapodes: Bruijn's Brush-turkey (*Aepyodius bruijnii*) was first described by E. Oustalet in 1880, based on one specimen that reached the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris in 1879 through the Dutch feather merchant A.A. Bruijn who was stationed on the island of Ternate. The bird belongs to the Avian family Megapodiidae, the so-called Megapodes, of which the 22 species are distributed over Australia, Papua New Guinea, East-Indonesia, the Philippines, the Nicobar Islands and some islands in the Southwest-Pacific (Tonga, Mariana). Most species occur in the Indo-Australian region where they inhabit tropical (mountain) forests. Megapodes exhibit peculiar and unique breeding habits: they use external heat sources (instead of body heat) to incubate their eggs. Some species bury their eggs in the sand of sun-drenched beaches (like sea-turtles) and let the heat produced by the sun incubate the eggs, and others build huge mounds of leaf litter to lay their eggs in, where heat produced by rotting leaves causes eggs to hatch. Megapode chicks emerge fully self-supporting and are immediately able to fly. [Kris Tindige papubirdclub@hotmail.com on orientalbirding@yahoo.com]

Minimum Considerations for Verification of Sight

Records of Birds

Charles R. Smith

There has been much progress in bird identification since Audubon had to verify his observations over the barrel of a muzzle-loader. In the absence of a collected specimen, one's observations can be subjected to alternative means of verification. Often, when unusual birds are observed, or common birds are observed under unusual circumstances, the observer

will want to report what has been seen to someone. The observer also may expect their observation to be published in a local or regional report, or added to check-lists of birds for the region in which the observation occurred. In so doing, one may be challenged to demonstrate the accuracy and veracity of the observation and evidence may be solicited to verify the account. In contexts where verification of observations is desirable, good quality photographs of the observed species supplement, but do not substitute for a detailed, written account of the observation. Descriptions of the rarity from such written accounts should be sufficient to permit identification of the species, using only the written description, by an independent, experienced observer... Consideration of at least the following points, at the time of the observation, will enhance the chances that an observation will be verifiable and acceptable as a record of occurrence to more experienced observers. These suggestions are based, in part, on those offered by Axtell (1955d), and form a basis for review of observations of rarities in modern times by state avian records committees, like the New York State Avian Records Committee (DeBenedictis 1978).

1. Date and time of day of the observation.
2. Number of individuals of the species in question which were seen.
3. Detailed account of the location of the observation; include its distance from a nearby highway intersection or prominent landmark; a map, or specific reference to a U.S. Geological Survey topographic quadrangle, would help.
4. Names of other observers accompanying you who saw the bird, and identified it.
5. Names of other observers, if any, who independently identified the bird in agreement with your identification; explain the circumstances.
6. Your previous acquaintance with this species; how many times have you seen it over how many years?
7. Type, brand, magnification, objective lens diameter, and condition of optical equipment used.
8. Distance at which you saw the bird and how the distance was judged, i.e. was it estimated, paced, or measured with a tape.
9. Lighting conditions: (a) Was it generally sunny or were there light, medium, or dark clouds? (b) Was the bird in the open or in light, medium, or deep shade? (c) Where was the sun as you faced the bird and in relation to the bird (behind you, in front of you, to your left or right side)?
10. What was the bird doing and what was its position in relation to the observer (e.g. high in a tree, on the ground, in low bushes)?
11. What was the habitat like; in what kinds of vegetation was the bird seen?
12. Length of time the bird was studied under the above conditions and was it determined from a watch or estimated.
13. What field marks were observed and other details noted which contributed to your certainty of your identification?
14. What diagnostic habits, songs, calls, or associated species were noted?
15. What other similar or confusing species were considered and eliminated by the evidence you collected during the observation of this species?
16. References consulted: (a) Did you use a field guide or similar aid during the observation? (b) Have you referred to any aid such as a book, illustration, or knowledgeable ornithologist since the observation? (c) If you answer, "Yes" to either (a) or (b), how, specifically, did the aid(s)

consulted influence your conclusions and what aid was used?

17. Were written field notes, including most of the above information, taken in the field at the time of the observation? If notes were not taken in the field, how long

after the observation were they transcribed and what references were consulted in the interim.

[Nitin Jamdar <nitinjamdar@hotmail.com> on Birds of Bombay <birdsofbombay@yahoo.com>]

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

KRISHNA DISTRICT

Machilipatnam (CC)

- 7.iii: YELLOW BITTERN 1.
8.iii: INDIAN REEF HERON 5; CURLEW 1; CASPIAN TERN 3.
9.iii: LITTLE GREEN HERON 2; INDIAN REEF HERON 10; YELLOW BITTERN 1; TEREK SANDPIPER 1; BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER 3.
11.iii: EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 3; YELLOW WAGTAIL c. 70.
12.iii: WHITE IBIS 7 imm; GREY-HEADED LAPWING 6; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 2; BAYA PRB, active around N; WHITE-BACKED MUNIA PRB, carrying N-mat.
14.iii: OPENBILL STORK c. 50; BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER 3.
15.iii: INDIAN REEF HERON c. 10; CHESTNUT BITTERN 2; RUDDY SHELDUCK 15; WHIMBREL 2; CURLEW 5; TEREK SANDPIPER 2; GREAT BLACK-HEADED GULL 1 (1st winter); LITTLE TERN c. 50.
21.iii: CHESTNUT BITTERN 1.
22.iii: WHIMBREL 2; CURLEW 4; TEREK SANDPIPER 7.
23.iii: WHITE IBIS 2 ad., 1 juv; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 1; PAINTED SNIPE 1; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; ROSY PASTOR 20.
25.iii: BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER 2.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Sultanpur Lake

- 24.xii.2000 (PP, RL): ROSY PELICAN c. 100.
17.ii (MB): SARUS CRANE 1 pair.

- 19.ii (BH, CH, ND): COMMON QUAIL 2; GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK c. 400; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER 1; STOLICZKA'S BUSHCHAT 1 ad M.
25.ii: BONELLI'S EAGLE 1 imm attacking waterfowl; RED-HEADED MERLIN 2 in fit; INDIAN COURSER c. 12; SHORT-EARED OWL 1; WR YNECK 2; EASTERN CALANDRA LARK c. 20; BLACK-HEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 1; LONG-TAILED MINIVET c. 4; STOLICZKA'S BUSHCHAT 1 ad M; ISABELLINE WHEATEAR 1 M; DESERT WHEATEAR. 1 F, 1 M; PIED CHAT 1 M.
25.iii: INDIAN SANDGROUSE 1 pair.

Basai Wetland

- 19.ii: BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 750; CURLEW 1 ad., in a wheat field.

SONIPAT DISTRICT (AB)

- 29.xii.2000: PALLAS'S GULL 1 ad.
25.iii: PIED AVOCET 183, feeding in Purkhas village pond; WHITE-BELLIED DRONGO 1 ad.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Anil Bhola (AB); Bill Harvey (BH); Colin Conroy (CC); Clive Harris (CH); Colin Conroy (CC); Martin Barry (MB); Nikhil Devasar (ND); Pranay Juwadi (PJ); Pratibha Pandey (PP); Ranjit Lal (RL); S. Ashok Kumar (SAK); Zaibin, AP (ZAP);

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"This is my response to Kumar Ghorpadé's eminently erudite letters. They make great reading and are intellectually challenging. He writes extremely well. Unhappily, why this terrible chip on his shoulder about scientists and his contempt for us poor birdwatchers? How does a birdwatcher of the garden variety like Futehally, the late Shivraj Kumar and myself be taken seriously? When do 'Tweety Cats' of the Sylvester variety like Dharmakumarsinhji, Sálím Ali and Humayun Abdulali become systematists? But then I can sympathise with Kumar when he expresses anger or frustration against the scientists that appear to be sprouting like toadstools on a rainy day. What concerns me is whether Dr. Santharam is a better birdwatcher now that he has been tagged than the wonderful youth who rhapsodized the Yellow-wattled Lapwings nesting beside the Adyar—a boy I specially made an effort to track down? And how does one classify Aasheesh, Siraj and their admirable friends? Yet, Kumar do continue your tirades they make great reading and yes, I resonate with you against the tendency to talk of 'invasions' into India. The Satpura Hypothesis to my mind is suspect when one sees the Nilgiri Tahr. It could not have flown from hill top to hill top or got blown there as possibly spores of bracken ferns might have."

—Lavkumar Khacher, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608) E-mail: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IP TTTA



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 121: May 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed 11.8.2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 13-v-2001: Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad city: Members are requested to reach the park entrance by 7.30am. Carry water and snacks. For directions and information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 21-v-2001, 6 p.m.: Illustrated talk by Dr C. Tom Hash on birdwatching in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

The Clandestine Trade of Nests Of The Edible-nest Swiftlets At Vengurla Rocks

Dr Satish Pande

I visited the Vengurla Rocks Burnt Island, locally called Bandra, on April 1, 2001 with Mr Vishwas Katdare and Ram Mone of Chiplun. We reached there in a fibre body motor driven ferry, starting from the fishing hamlet of Niwati-Medha, Kochra, District Sindhudurga. This island is one of the three larger islands, two of which have the new and the old Vengurla lighthouses. It is 7 nautical miles from the coast of Niwati-Medha.

In a cave facing northeast, which is about 50m in length and 60 feet in height, there is a traditional roosting and nesting site of the Edible-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia unicolor*). Burnt Island was visited some 35 years ago by Humayun Abdulali and others and since then no bird watcher has set foot in this cave.

To our utter dismay we found a truckload of bamboos neatly tied together to make a lattice all along the cave. This framework filled the entire cave space reaching the roof. The floor of the cave was ankle deep with bird shit and the cave was filled with rank odour. Old rotting bamboos were littered everywhere on the floor meaning that the bamboos were constantly replaced.

The cave was abuzz with the flurry of flying swifts and atleast 3,000 nests were present on the walls of the cave on that day. These shiny pearly-white nests are built from the bird's saliva and are stuck half-cup wise to the vertical walls of the cave by the swifts. There is a heavy demand for these nests for aphrodisiac and other so called properties in the Far East Asian countries where the bird's-nest soup and canned drinks are sold.

It was learnt from the costal hamlets that some people from southern India visit this cave twice a year and stay there for a few days and take away something, probably birdshit for medicinal value! The people are not aware of the swifts or their edible nests.

It is very clear looking at the bamboo framework and ample birdshit on the floor that the clandestine visitors come to collect the bird nests and not guano. The guano story is a purposeful bluff to avoid attention. The time of harvest of the nests is April end and October, before and after the SW Monsoon. These 3000 or so nests are therefore under immediate threat. They are likely to be collected any time now. [Downloaded from Birds of Bombay mailing list]

[Editors' Note: After the above report, the following information was subsequently posted on the Internet by Dr Satish Pande and Amit Chavan: "I would like to inform you that owing to the nonstop follow up 5 people were arrested red-handed with 6 bags full of birds' nests at the Vengurla Rocks by the forest authorities. Through the good offices of Vice-Admiral M.P. Awati, the Coast Guard dispatched a helicopter and the Indian Navy a ship, to the island. The team of DCF Sawantwadi, Mr Gupta and Mr Saxena of Kolhapur, deserves our thanks. Of the 3,000 nests less than half were removed. Even this is something to be very sad about. But we have yet to remove the bamboo framework which shall also be done."]

Birds paying a price for global sprawl

John Flicker

For thousands of years, birds have been one of our most important early warning systems. Birds have predicted the change of seasons, the coming of storms, the presence of land at sea, and the rise of toxic levels of pollution in the food chain.

Now birds are telling us something is terribly wrong with the environment. More than 50 percent of migrant songbirds in vast sections of the United States are in decline.

In Pennsylvania, for example, populations of Eastern Wood-Pewee, Golden-winged Warblers, Blue Grosbeaks,

and Wood Thrushes have plummeted over the course of the last 20 years.

Across the nation, warblers are in decline, as are painted buntings, bobolinks, and dozens of other songbirds. Scientists now think the decline of these songbirds is due to habitat destruction, both overseas and in the United States, caused by rapid rates of human population growth.

Many of "our" songbirds spend four to nine months of the year in the tropical forests of Latin America and the Caribbean. These forests are being cut to the ground at record rates.

In Central America, for example, more than 40 percent of the forest canopy has been destroyed in the last 30 years as the population of that region has doubled.

Here in the United States, where we are adding more than 2 million people a year to our own population, suburban sprawl consumes in excess of 500,000 acres of forest and farmland per year, more than 20 million acres since 1980.

To put it another way, the United States is adding a population larger than Philadelphia, Camden, N.J., Wilmington, Del., and Trenton, N.J., every year, while suburban sprawl is consuming an area five times larger than the city limits of Philadelphia and Camden combined. In short, whether the birds are flying north or south, they are being hammered by rapid rates of population growth. But it's not just the birds.

What's happening to birds in the United States is happening to wildlife habitat all over the world, to tigers and elephants in Asia, to birds and chimpanzees in Africa, to jaguars and parrots in South America.

And while many of the world's creatures are in peril now, the real trouble lies ahead. Across the globe, more than a billion teenagers are now entering their reproductive years, the largest cluster of teenagers in world history.

The choices these young people make in the next decade will determine the fate of our natural world for generations to come. If birthrates remain at current levels, demographers say the world will add more people in the next 50 years than it has in the previous 500,000 years.

The good news is that most of these young people want to do the right thing: they want to have smaller families. Across vast parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, however, the kind of basic family planning services that you and I take for granted are simply unavailable: the people are too poor, the family planning options not understood, the access to birth control limited or non-existent.

One reason for this is that the United States has done so little to help. While world population has climbed 60 percent since 1970, U.S. family planning assistance, as a percent of total federal budget outlays, has declined by 40 percent.

And while we joined with 179 other nations in Cairo in 1994 in pledging specific support for international family planning efforts, the United States has actually made good on less than one-third of that commitment.

Population growth is about more than the environment, of course.

It's also about dizzying rates of infant and maternal mortality, crushing unemployment rates, and rising levels of social and economic instability in the developing world. Most experts agree that no single investment in human health, environmental protection, or political stability can ever match investments made in international family planning.

Yet, here in the United States we continue to act as if population growth never comes home to roost. The birds tell us a different story, however.

They remind us that long before there were multinational corporations, or fiber optic cables, birds connected us to the larger world and served as barometers of environmental health.

Now, like a canary in the coal mine, they warn us of the price we may yet pay, in our own back yard, for failing to adequately fund family planning services in the developing world. [John Flicker is president of the National Audubon Society. Downloaded from [\[BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU\]](mailto: [BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU])

New species

In June 1992, a flycatcher was observed and tape-recorded at an elevation of 1000 m in south-eastern Ecuador which could not be assigned to any known species. Later that year, a pair was collected. After comparison of the vocalizations and the study of skins, Paul Coopmans and Niels Krabbe were convinced that they had found a new species. Additional specimens were collected in 1996 in north-eastern Ecuador and a specimen from Peru was identified in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History. The new species has now been formally described as *Foothill Elaenia Myiopagis olallai* (Coopmans, P & Krabbe, N 2000. A new species of flycatcher (Tyrannidae: *Myiopagis*) from eastern Ecuador and eastern Peru. *Wilson Bull* 112: 305-312). *M. olallai* closely resembles Grey *Elaenia M. caniceps* and Forest *Elaenia M. gaimardii*, but it is well differentiated vocally. Foothill *Elaenia* is now known to occur in the foothills of the Andes (890-1500 m): in two national parks in Ecuador (three sites on the slope of the Sumaco volcano in north-eastern Ecuador, and one location near Zamora, south-eastern Ecuador; type locality) and from one location near Luisiana, Peru. Presumably, it also occurs locally in the region between these areas. However, forests at elevations where the species occurs are disappearing at an alarming rate. [André J van Loon in *Dutch Birding* 23: 61, 2001]

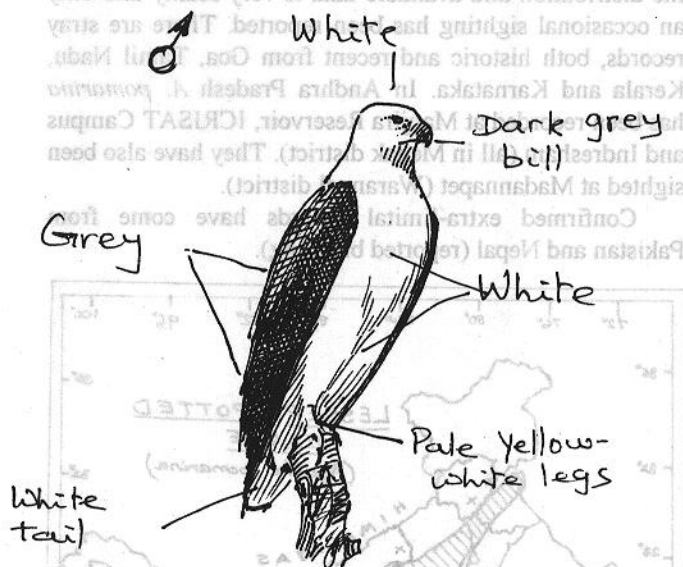
In July 1996, during an expedition of the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science, an unnamed isolated Andes peak (1538 m) was reached, c 77 km west-north-west of Contamana, Loreto, eastern Peru (c. 7005'S, 75039'W). During the survey of the surrounding cloud forest, the expedition members collected several specimens of a barbet which they immediately expected to be new to science. Recently, this new barbet has been formally described as *Scarlet-banded Barbet Capito wallacei* (O'Neill, JP, Lane, DF, Kratter, AW,

Capparella, AP & Fox Joo, C 2000. A striking new species of barbet (Capitoninae: Capito) from the eastern Andes of Peru. *Auk* 117: 569-577). Apart from the descriptions of the collected

birds, the paper also documents vocalizations and various aspects of the biology based on photographs, tape-recordings and field observations. *Continued on page 4*

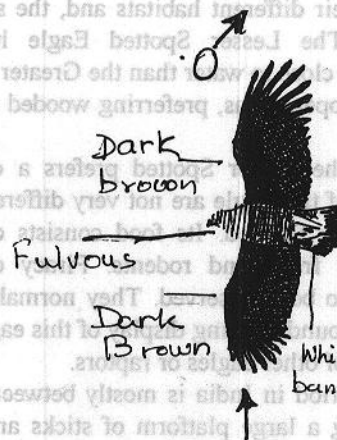
FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

Eagles are large powerful hunters having wide wings and short tails. They feed mostly on animal matter. In flight some have upturned wings, other have down-curved wings while some hold their wings level. Females are usually larger than males. Plumages vary and are confusing. Buzzards look like eagles but are smaller.



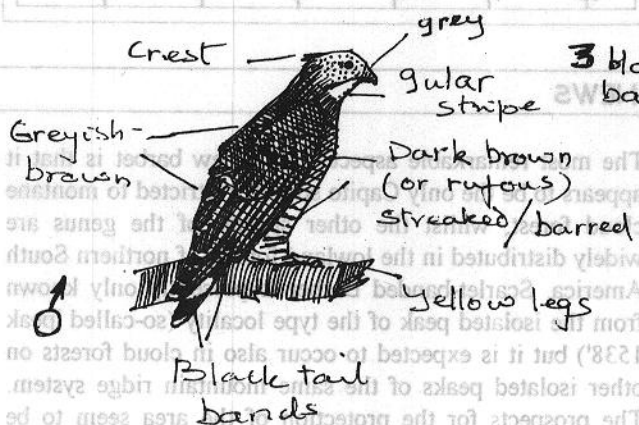
**WHITE-BELLIED
SEA EAGLE**

70 cms
(kite +)



**PALLA'S
FISHING
EAGLE**

80 cms
(kite +)



CRESTED

**HONEY
BUZZARD**

ABOUT 60cms
(kite +)

SPOTLIGHT: Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

Jerdon called it the "Longlegged Eagle" and in many parts of India, falconers call it the *Pahadi teesa*. More commonly and wherever it is found, it is known as the Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*. Two races are recognised, the nominate *A. p. pomarina* found in Central and Eastern Europe east to Russian and the Caucasus and south to Greece which winters in Africa up to Mozambique. The race *A. p. hastata* is the one found in India and north Myanmar. Some taxonomists do not consider the differences strong enough to require a splitting of races.

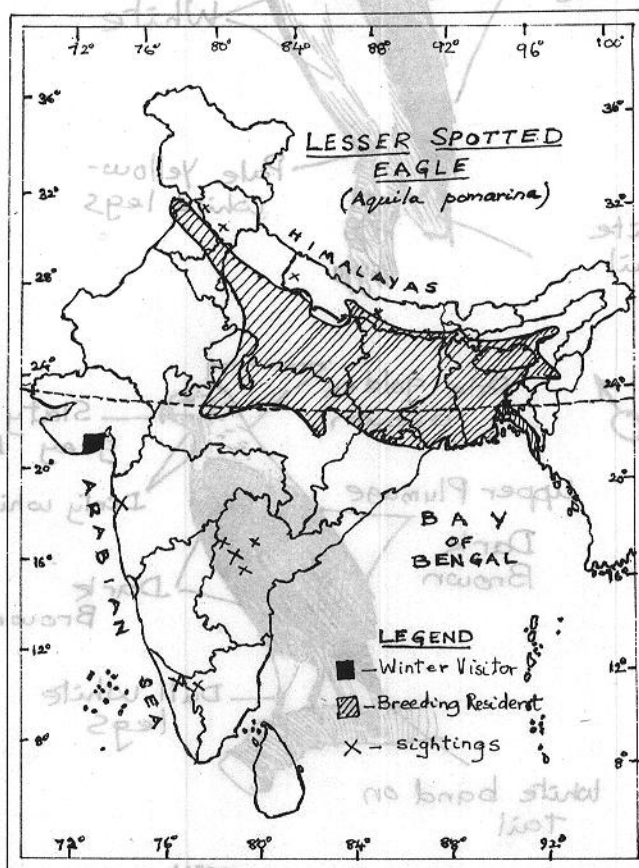
This is a stocky medium-sized eagle which in the adult stage is difficult to distinguish in the field from the Greater Spotted Eagle *A. clanga*. The Lesser Spotted Eagle is uniformly dark brown with the head larger than that of the *clanga*. The wings are relatively narrower and the tail is long and wedge-shaped. It has a tawny coloured patch on the nape. The feather coverings on the legs are short and the tarsus comparatively thinner. The bill is slaty blue and the feet are dull yellow with black talons. Immature Lesser Spotted Eagles have fewer and smaller spots on the wing coverts than the immature Greater Spotted Eagles. In practice, medium-sized brown eagles are best distinguished by their different habitats and, the shape of wings in flight. The Lesser Spotted Eagle has less preference for areas close to water than the Greater Spotted and is seen less in open areas, preferring wooded areas in the plains.

Even though the Lesser Spotted prefers a different habitat, the habits of this eagle are not very different from those of the Greater Spotted. Its food consists of small mammals, reptiles, frogs and rodents. Piracy of other birds' nests has also been observed. They normally catch their prey on the ground. Mating display of this eagle is as spectacular as that of other eagles or raptors.

The nesting period in India is mostly between April-July, the nest being a large platform of sticks and twigs built on tall trees like mango, *peepal*, *sal*, etc. Many times, old nests are renewed. Usually 1-2 white eggs with dark brown markings are laid. Incubation is done by the female only and lasts for about 42-44 days.

Wherever the Lesser Spotted Eagle occurs it is rare. In India it has been recorded from Saurashtra (Gujarat), Maharashtra, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, N.E. States and Bangladesh north Madhya Pradesh. South of central India the distribution and available data is very scanty and only an occasional sighting has been reported. There are stray records, both historic and recent from Goa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh *A. pomarina* has been recorded at Manjira Reservoir, ICRISAT Campus and Indresham (all in Medak district). They have also been sighted at Madannapet (Warangal district).

Confirmed extra-limital records have come from Pakistan and Nepal (reported breeding).



NOTES & NEWS

...Continued from page 3: Also, plumages and vocalizations are extensively compared with those of other Neotropical barbets and discussed in relation to existing phylogenetic studies on the Capitoninae. *C. wallacei* belongs to a group of largely black-and-white plumaged birds, also containing Orange-fronted *C. squamatus*, Spot-crowned *C. maculicoronatus* and White-mantled Barbets *C. hypoleucus*.

The most remarkable aspect of this new barbet is that it appears to be the only Capito species restricted to montane cloud forest, whilst the other species of the genus are widely distributed in the lowland forests of northern South America. Scarlet-banded Barbet is presently only known from the isolated peak of the type locality (so-called 'peak 1538') but it is expected to occur also in cloud forests on other isolated peaks of the same mountain ridge system. The prospects for the protection of the area seem to be

promising. [André J van Loon in Dutch Birding 23: 61, 2001]

Grey Quail at an apartment

Siraj A. Taher

At 10pm on 2 April 2001 I was watching television when Humayun called me out. Asking me to be quiet and cautious, he pointed to a corner where there seemed to be a large blob unsuccessfully trying to hide. A little movement and it revealed its identity as a quail. With the help of a towel and a flashlight we picked up the bird. Some initial doubts, a quick reference to the Handbook and we identified it as a female Grey (Common) Quail *Coturnix coturnix*.

After taking the measurements, we found a suitable box to put it in for the night. A few grains of rice and a

small cup of water was also kept in the box—just in case. The bird was very active and alert when we were handling it and its crop seemed full. Apparently it had fed well. It is possible that the quail was preparing for its return migration or it might have been an escapee from someone who had purchased it from the local market at Yerragadda. In either case it must have been dazzled by the lights and landed at the second floor of our building.

The bird was released the next day, 3 April 2001, in Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad—which has good habitats for quails. It was ringed with a Bombay Natural History Society ring # AB 147510. Its measurements were: Tarsus 29mm, wing 105mm, bill (from skull) 12mm and tail 41mm.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu Heronry 15.iii (KMR, KHR)

GREY PELICAN 362 CB, N with nestlings & imm. LITTLE CORMORANT 96; WHITE IBIS 50; PAINTED STORK 506 CB, N with nestlings & imm.

CHANDIGARH

Sukhna Lake 7.iv (JLS)

GREY HERON 12; OPENBILL STORK 3; GREYLAG GOOSE 7; BRAHMINY DUCK 12; TUFTED POCHARD 12; SMALL INDIAN PRATINCOLE 1; CLIFF SWALLOW C 50 CB, N with yng; PADDYFIELD PIPIT 1 CB, fledgling in N; WHITE WAGTAIL (*M. a. alboloides*) 10, (*M. a. personata*) 1.

DELHI

Asola Wildlife Reserve (BH)

19.iv: YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 12 ad. CB, 2 N with 4 eggs each.

Okhla

3.iv: BAILLON'S CRAKE 1; ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE 2; WHITE-TAILED STONECHAT CB N with 3 yng (ND).

17.iv: GREATER FLAMINGO c. 200; RUDDY SHELDUCK 70; BLACK-WINGED STILT c. 50 CB; ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE 10; WHISKERED TERN c. 150 many in br., plm; BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER 4; YELLOW WAGTAIL c. 300 (BH).

14.iv: GREEN MUNIA 1ad; RED-HEADED BUNTING c. 30 (SC).

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Sultanpur

19.ii: WHITE-BELLIED MINIVET 1 pair (BH).

15.iv: STONE CURLEW 2 CB, N with 1 egg, INDIAN COURSER 18. CB, feeding yng (BH, ND, KK).

Basai (BH)

15.iv: BLACK-NECKED STORK 2; WHITE IBIS c. 30; GLOSSY IBIS c. 30 PRB, many in br., plm; SARUS CRANE 2; RUFF c. 4000; BLACK-WINGED STILT c. 100.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

Bhindawas (SCS, VK)

13.iv: WHITE PELICAN c. 50 fishing; GREY HERON c. 50. CB, 4 N on a Peepal tree; NIGHT HERON PRB in tall grass in water, 40 ad., 3 juv.; PAINTED STORK c. 50; WHITE-NECKED STORK 5; BLACK-NECKED STORK 2; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 50; SPOTBILL DUCK c. 500; GARGANEY 30; COMB DUCK 36 including some M in br., plm; SHIKRA CB, M on N in Eucalyptus tree; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 1; SARUS CRANE PRB a pair displaying; PURPLE MOORHEN c. 300; WHITE-TAILED LAPWING 2; PAINTED SNIPE 1 ad., M; RED-WINGED BUSHLARK (*M. erythroptera*) PRB, 1 disp; EASTERN SKYLARK (*Alauda gulgula*) PRB, disp; ROSY PASTOR c. 5000 on roadside trees; WHITE-BROWED FANTAIL; INDIAN GREAT REED WARBLER 2; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER C; LESSER WHITETHROAT C.

22.iv: SIND SPARROW 1 ad M (SCS).

SONIPAT DISTRICT

Kakroi Village (AB)

31.iii: GREY DRONGO 1 in the highest branches of Eucalyptus trees; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 2 ad., white M, 1 ad., brown M, 1 F; WHITE-CAPPED BUNTING 1 ad., M, 2 F.

1.iv: CRESTED HONEY-BUZZARD 4; GREEN PIGEON 10 on Eucalyptus; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 ad., white M, 1 ad., brown M, 1 F.

Kharkhoda (SCS, VK)

14.iv: GREY HORNBILL PRB, 2 (pair?) peering into a 3" dia., hole c. 20' up a Neem tree.

8.iv: Chhota Thana: GREY HERON CB, 3 N on Mango & Jamun trees c. 20' up; EGYPTIAN VULTURE 2 CB, N with yng c. 30' up Mango tree (AB).

Drain Number Eight (SS, SCS)

8.iv: GREAT HORNED OWL 1; CRESTED BUNTING 1 ad., M singing, 1 ad., F.

Rohat Village (AB, SC, SCS, VMT)

21.iv: LITTLE GREBE CB, 1 N under const; PAINTED STORK c. 20; BLACK-NECKED STORK 2+2+1 ad; WHITE IBIS 11; GARGANEY 60 M (only M counted); HONEY BUZZARD 2+2+2; SARUS CRANE 1+2+2+19 ad; INDIAN CUCKOO 1 F; RED-WHISKERED BULBUL 2; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB, 1 pair carrying N-mat.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore City

16.iv: MAGPIE ROBIN Female frequently and found inside the artificial wooden nest boxes put in a nest with entrance hole of 38 mm at a height of 4 metres from ground on a Eucalyptus tree in Sadashivnagar (LS, JNP).

18.iv: BLUE ROCK PIGEON A pair of mating on Cunningham road (JNP).

MYSORE DISTRICT

Ranganathitto Bird Sanctuary 19.iii (US)

STEPPE EAGLE 1.

Mysore City 12.iv (PNS)

GOLDEN ORIOLE in large nos.; WHITE-THROATED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 1+1+1+1; GREY-HEADED MYNA; HOUSE

SWALLOW; LESSER WHITETHROAT; WHITE WAGTAIL; GREY WAGTAIL 2.

TUMKUR DISTRICT

Devarayana Durga 18.iii (PKK, UHK)

YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL CB 1 seen collecting twigs. 2 others on a fruiting *Ficus* sp., driven off by Jungle Babblers.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-commonly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; ls-island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Anil Bhola (AB); Bill Harvey (BH); J.L. Singh (JLS); JN Prasad (JNP); K. Hanumantha Rao (KHR); K. Mrutyamjaya Rao (KMR); Kryz Kazmierczak (KK); Nikhil Devasar (ND); Lakshmi Srivatsa (LS); P.Karthik Kumar (PKK); Prashanth N Srinivas (PNS); Sadhana Sharma (SS); Sunita Chaudhry (SC); Suresh Chand Sharma (SCS); U.Harish Kumar (UHK); Umesh Srinivasan (US); V.M. Tiwari (VMT); Virendra Kumar (VK).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"It was disturbing to read Dr Ghorpadé's Letter in the *Pitta* of April 2001. The tirade against Sálím Ali and everything and anybody connected with him is totally out of place and in bad taste. According to Dr Ghorpadé, Sálím Ali never considered himself a taxonomist and his main interest was the living bird—so, why these 'fire-and-ice' opinions expressed in the article? Picking upon Zafar Futehally and his family connections with Sálím Ali and him having bought Dr Ghorpadé's ancestral land is stooping too low. None of these I'm sure has anything to do with Futehally's contributions to ornithology. He would have done equally well anywhere else.

"This scientist / non-scientist attitude should end now. Yes, the taxonomists from the beginning till date have made and continue to make immense contributions to all forms of scientific studies and everyone acknowledges this. At the same time the amateurs have also contributed greatly to all natural sciences, ecological studies and conservation. Taxonomic studies had great importance for many years during and after classification work. It continues to be of importance even today, but less so. Nowadays the emphasis is on conservation of habitats and to some extent on species / races also. It really does not matter whether it is the Blewitt's Owlet or the Scops Owl, the Long-billed Vulture or the Cinereous Vulture—if their habitat is under threat, every one of the species is in danger of extinction. Let us put our heads together and attend to the environmental problems collectively rather than squabble like children.

"At the end, Dr Ghorpadé is sarcastic and indicates what and how he will write in future. This is very wrong. He must stick to scientific writing rather than pick up on personalities. The *Pitta* cannot and should not be used by anyone to settle scores."

—Zafar H. Hydari, Chicago, USA.

"For the last 27 years I've had a pet Roseringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, which died in the 3rd week of April 2001. I wonder whether this is a longevity record of some kind for the species."

—Rajeev Mathew, Hyderabad, India

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608) E-mail: aasheesh@nd1.vsnl.net.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

Note: Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's Letter will resume next month.

Renew your BSAP membership for 2001-2002 today!

IP TTTA



2.7.2001

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No.122-123: June-July 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed 11.9.2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 22-vii-2001: Chilkur Deer Park, Hyderabad city: Members are requested to reach the park entrance by 7.00am. Carry water and snacks. For directions and information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 16-vii-2001, 6 p.m.: Film show. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Humayun Abdulali 1914-2001

An Ornithologist Extraordinaire

Siraj A. Taher

Earlier this year it was Sidney Dillon Ripley and now it is Humayun Abdulali. The ornithological community is poorer in their passing away. But then what a group it must be up there—Jerdon, Hume, Whistler, Peter Scott, Sálím Ali, Krishnan and now these two. While Sálím Ali and Ripley liked to work with the 'living bird' and were always in the forefront of any project, field work, scientific expeditions and writings, Abdulali worked equally conscientiously and with as great a dedication and motivation, both in the field and behind the scenes, in a museum room. This is how he chose to be. Unseen, but not necessarily, unheard. He involved himself with all aspects of scientific studies, whether field work, taxonomy, ecology or conservation. He was meticulous and thorough in his research. Moreover, Abdulali did not restrict himself to bird studies alone, though this seemed to be his first love. He had varied interests and contributed a great deal to the study and conservation of mammals and reptiles too. His contributions to all aspects of natural sciences are an unending source of data and knowledge for future students and researchers. He had critically commented upon many aspects of bird studies but his *mágnun opus* is the serialised paper entitled "A catalogue of birds in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society". Unfortunately due to age and failing health he could not complete the project himself. If and when completed, this would be a fitting tribute to this great person. Though not a qualified scientist, he trained himself throughout his life to be as efficient a naturalist as any. He may not have written a book but his checklists, papers and notes in journals and scientific publications runs into a few hundreds.

Humayun Abdulali was born on 14th June 1914 and died on 2nd June 2001. He was a wonderful person with a great

insight into things and a subtle sense of humour. His forthright and no-nonsense attitude may have irked some people but few doubt his genuine love and concern for nature, especially birds. He was even helpful to anyone who approached him for guidance and advice. His sound judgement, unassuming efficiency, boundless energy, indomitable endurance and enthusiasm for any work on hand made him an interesting and very considerate man. A stalwart in the field of ornithology, his departure from the scene has created a void that will be very difficult to fill.

Humayun *chacha*— Of birds and all things natural

Sunjoy Monga

"As long as I live, I'll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing. I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can." These poignant words by John Muir are for Humayun Abdulali, the grand young man of Indian ornithology who passed away last night.

Humayun, simply *chacha* to many of us, and Guru to me, was, I am sure, the greatest birder I knew, and it is his style of birding that appealed to many of us instantly.

How can I ever forget my first encounter with the great man? I was 14 then. The year was 1976. It was early-June (9th June, c. 0945hrs) and the monsoon was yet to break in full force. My friend Joslin had climbed a leafy tree just near Culvert 13 in Mumbai's National Park and as he jumped down, a car screeched to a halt. At the wheel was an elderly gentleman, accompanied by a charming, elderly lady. "What are you doing here?" he inquired, his eyes so penetrating, his Einstein-like nose so delightful on his expression. He had caught us, of course, he had. "And what are you hiding?" he asked Joslin, who sheepishly stretched out his hand to reveal the nest he had pilfered. It was an Iora's nest, abandoned after the two chicks had presumably flown away the week before. We later showed the

gentleman the nest of a long-tailed, black bird which he informed, was of a Racket-tailed Drongo. He invited us to accompany him and we drove to Vihar Lake. A few field chairs were set up and out came a huge thermos flask. Over the next decade I was to spend long, long hours with that grand thermos—and with the venerable Humayun Abdulali.

Between 1976 and 1993, I was extremely fortunate to accompany Humayun on at least 200 field visits, mostly around Mumbai. Each one of them was a voyage of discovery for Humayun was unimaginably inquisitive, like a child, and ready for anything. We went for partridge shoots just north of Mumbai and up above Kanheri Caves Jos and I gripped his feet tight as he leaned over a 200 foot cliff face to view Shahin Falcons feeding on parakeets; I once held him tight as he wished to check a Black-naped Blue Flycatcher's nest out of reach off a culvert. He went crashing into the bush below, injuring his elbow. His age notwithstanding, he asked me to once accompany him to the heights above Kanheri to look out for frogs he had discovered there years ago. Alas, pollution and related tourist-acts had all but robbed the frogs from those ancient cisterns and Humayun let go the choicest expletives for all that mattered.

In a summer during the late 1970s, Jos and I assured him of Paradise Flycatcher and Golden Oriole nesting in Mumbai, but he had to see them. So he dashed off to Kandivli whilst the Golden Oriole nest was still active. He bounded like crazy in the marshes and grassy tracts of now defaced Charkop to view a dozen nests of larks that we showed him, delirious and then with his feet knee-deep in muck he politely declined my offer of lunch at our house. "Your mother will throw me out if she sees me like this," he said. Of course we went to my house and spent three delightful hours with the family.

Many were the birding tricks learnt from him. To spot birds by looking at their shadow on the ground. To discover nests by merely observing the birds, not hunting around like crazy. Great identification tips and so much more. All those hundreds of hours with him I will forever cherish.

Here was an institution, no less, a veritable field-laboratory-cum-guide. He was the one man who played a critical role in getting Mumbai's City Forest—the unique National Park—declared so. He fought for it and fought hard.

I was delighted when he agreed to write the foreword for *City Forest: Mumbai's National Park*. But I will never forget those few minutes a couple of months ago. Humayun cried when I met him for tea at his residence. It so happened that just the day before he had visited the National Park (I think that was his last visit) and for the first time in more than 80 years Humayun had been unable to see a bird someone was showing him. His eyesight had deteriorated too. He cried and I had never ever thought I would see Humayun cry. They were tears of a sorrow I had never before experienced and cannot describe in words.

This morning (3rd June) we, 20 of us, were on the Bird Count programme in the forest Humayun loved so much. There was no better way we thought to salute the great man than by observing the birds he lived for. Suddenly, a Shikra

soared high over Tulsi Valley, shrieking loud as a Honey Buzzard took off and myriad Peafowl called out loud. Green pigeons fluttered as Three-toed Kingfishers and Malabar Whistling Thrush and hornbills and 50 other bird species sang and shrieked. I have today deliberately used the old names of birds for Humayun knew them so and wished them to be referred so when talking or writing to him.

There was an awful lot of bird activity today and most of the members of our team agreed it was so. Of course it had to do with the imminent monsoon. BUT I THINK THE BIRDS WERE DOING IT ALL FOR THE FORMIDABLE HUMAYUN ABDULALI. People like him live forever and even the birds knew it all.

I was to meet him for tea at his Bandra residence on 14th May. Unfortunately I couldn't make it and called him to tell so. "After Kihim then" mentioned Mrs. Abdulali. "We are not so sure when we will get back since it is a long holiday we are taking". I do not know if Humayun went to Kihim but neither has he gone very far. I can still feel he is just round the corner, around Culvert 13 just past the Pongam Valley slope in Mumbai's peerless wilderness, the spot where we first met.

Not one given to tears I cannot help at this very moment. There was so much more to him than merely the breath of his body and we were so fortunate to know that side. [BirdsofBombay Mailing List: birdsofbombay@yahoogroups.com]

A few tid-bits on Humayun Abdulali's work

Aasheesh Pittie

Humayun Abdulali authored 267 papers, articles, notes, etc., in various journals. He may have the distinction of having authored the most number of papers on Indian natural history. Of these, 218 were on birds. The rest covered reptiles, plants, insects, shikar, law, health (how to deal with wasp stings!), etc. He also reviewed some 54 odd books in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. This journal carried the bulk of his papers (204 on birds alone).

His first paper appeared in 1931 entitled "Eleven Koel eggs in a Crow's nest". JBNHS 35(2): 458. His last, in 1996. The 37th part of his incomparable Catalogue of the bird collection in BNHS. Indeed, nobody could have taken on the herculean task of cataloging the Society's bird collection, but Abdulali *sahab*. My introduction to him was over a tray of wagtails!

It is just a thought but how about proposing to the BNHS to name the bird room where the bird collection is housed as the Humayun Abdulali Bird Room?

Humayun Abdulali also named quite a few races of birds. I could trace 15. Of these 8 are in use and 7 are not. In use: Blackcrested Baza *Aviceda leuphotes andamanica* Abdulali & Grubh 1970; Glossy Stare *Aplonis panayensis albiris* Abdulali 1967; Finn's Baya *Ploceus megarhynchus salimalii* Abdulali 1960; Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea andamanica* Abdulali 1964; Andaman Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia rufipennis andamanica* Abdulali 1967; Jungle Bush Quail *Perdicula asiatica vellorei* Abdulali & Reuben 1964;...Continued on page 7

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—44

"I should think that here [*sic!*] is no risk whatever in postulating that ancestral Dicrurids had a major, early center of development precisely between Aldabra Island and Sumatra/Malaya, Borneo, meaning in the end—of course—slightly to the south of the Bay of Bengal of our days. Naturally, birds so placed before the end of the Cretaceous would play fast and loose with the Bay of Bengal, for the very simple reason that by then the Bay of Bengal was not all water, just the northern rim of fairly extensive lands occupying the Northern Indian Ocean. It is on this rim and lands that Dicrurid birds first began to unlimber out of the matrix of ancestral stock including also the characters of a number of different families from Orioles to Birds of Paradise. Some of these characters went to Dicruridae in *re propria*, being today diagnostic of this Family in the standard texts of ornithology. The same is, of course, the case with plants. One may shift at his pleasure the base-line shown in fig. 11 [extending from the northern tip of Madagascar to some seven hundred kilometres south-east of Ceylon—K.G.] somewhat more to the north, south, west or east without changing the substances of the case in anything material."

[Leon Croizat, 1968, "The Biogeography of India: a note on some of its fundamentals," *Proceedings of the Symposium on Recent Advances in Tropical Ecology*, Benares Hindu University, Varanasi, Part II, p. 572.]

"Most of the previous biogeographical work on the Indian region (in the sense used here) was based on poor data on species distribution, on inadequate systematics of the groups involved, and various 'assumptions' taken for granted. In consequence, most of them read more like narrative stories of a *mass migration* of a whole fauna and flora from one region to the other. That is, from the Malayan Peninsula to Peninsular India... the central presupposition of the dominating present-day thinking about the historical biogeography of the Indian region (traditionally depicted as a triangular piece of land), is that of one that broke away from the Gondwanian Plate, and collided with the Eurasian Plate, creating in the process the Himalayan orogeny, but it had little (or no) fauna or flora of its own. So, it gradually received both the flora and the fauna from the Oriental and Afrotropical Regions..."

"However, the recent developments in biogeography (Croizat, 1958, 1968a, Humphries & Parenti, 1986, Humphries, 1992), and the relatively new cladistic systematics (Hennig, 1950, 1966; Brundin, 1966), have led to the hypothesis that the Earth and its biota have evolved together, and have the same history. Therefore, knowing the exact distribution of both widespread taxa and those that are endemic to the faunal centres of the Indian region is equally fundamental..."

"However, it is only in five faunal centres (as defined in this study below) that the really rich biodiversity is concentrated (see figures 2 and 3). The concentration of biodiversity is found along the major mountain ranges of the Himalaya, the Western Ghats, the Sri Lankan mountain system, north Burmese mountains and the island group of Andaman & Nicobars. The rest of the areas have lost practically all the richness, being now heavily populated and cultivated for hundreds of years (see also the classical paper of Randhawa, 1945, for the desiccation of the northern Indo-Gangetic plain)..."

[Harish Gaonkar, *in prep.*, "The Butterflies of the Indian Region", Volume 1: Biogeography, History and Annotated Bibliography.]

Leon Croizat's paper, synoptically summarized by me in Letter 42 (Pitta # 119, March 2001) is, I now believe, fundamental to the understanding of our sub-continent's biogeography. That "earth and life evolve together," and that the 'mass migrations' theory of old is now losing ground, must be realized by current biologists and amateur naturalists as well. Harish Gaonkar's unpublished text reproduced above (with his permission) also amplifies this modern scientific approach to biogeographical theories about our land, which was once part of the great supercontinent Gondwanaland occupying much of the southern hemisphere, and comprising of the continents we now know as South America, Africa (plus Madagascar), India (plus Ceylon), Australia (plus New Zealand), and Antarctica. In the late Permian—Triassic Geological Age (*ca* 250-200 million years ago) all the landmasses on earth were united as 'Pangaea'. But, in the Jurassic and Early Cretaceous (150-100 myA) this single landmass began breaking up into a northern hemisphere supercontinent 'Laurasia' (North America and Eurasia) and Gondwanaland, which itself began further breaking up and drifting apart as plates or sub-plates or micro-plates. The Greater Indian Plate, which was much larger and included adjacent lands, which have now sunk and formed the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal (*vide* Croizat, 1968), collided with the northern Eurasian landmass in the Early Eocene (*ca* 50 myA) and then "an era of earth movements set in which materially altered the old geography of the Indian region" (Croizat, 1968) in the sinking of "large segments of it underneath the sea" and the simultaneous uplift of what we now know as the Himalayas, the Western Ghats, and the north-south range of mountains from the Patkai Hills to the Arakan Yomas.

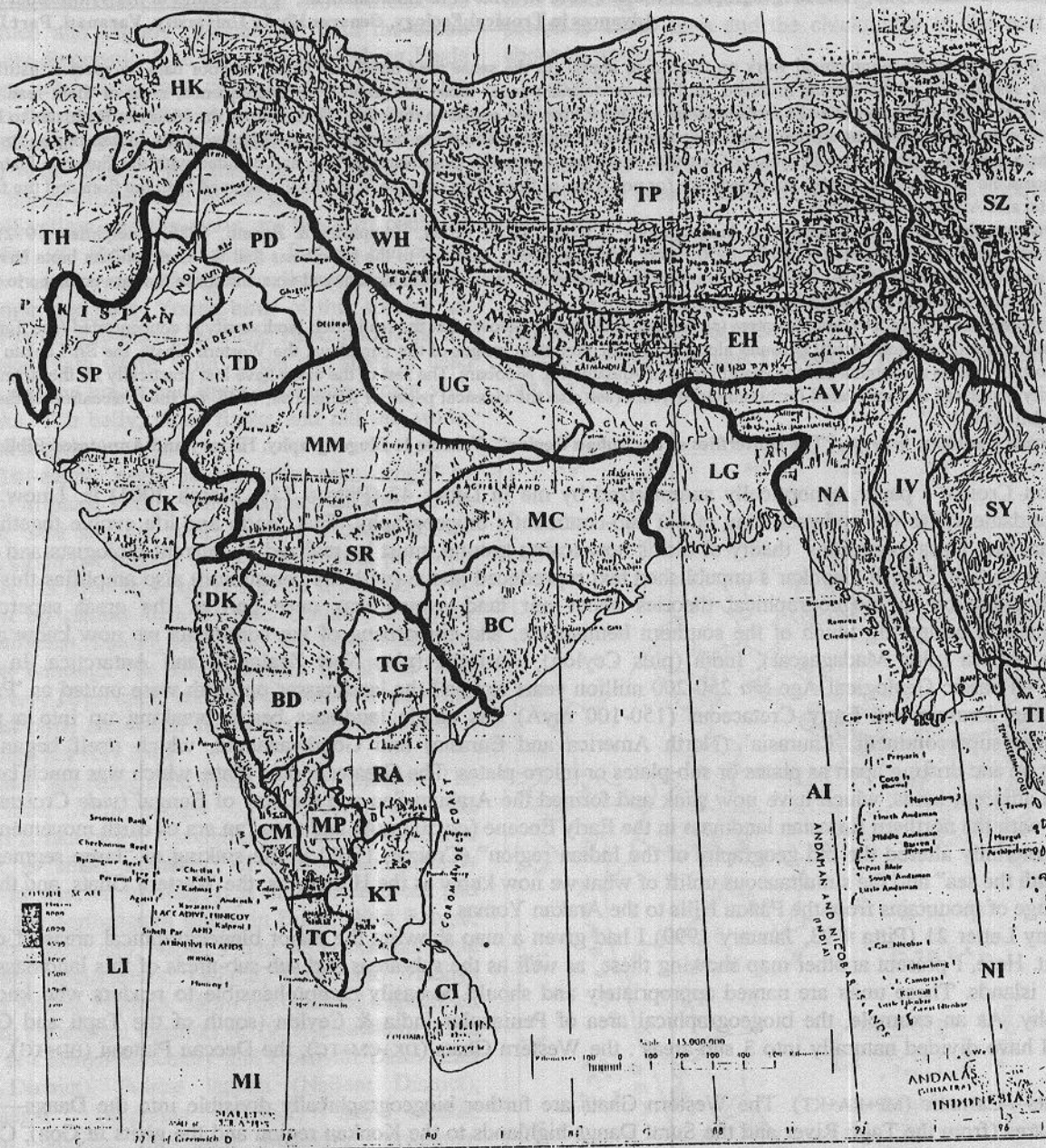
In my Letter 21 (Pitta # 93, January 1999) I had given a map showing the major biogeographical areas of our sub-continent. Here, I present another map showing these, as well as the sub-areas and sub-sub-areas of this landmass and its offshore islands. These units are named appropriately and should be easily comprehensible to readers who know their Geography. As an example, the biogeographical area of Peninsular India & Ceylon (south of the Tapti and Godavari Rivers) I have divided naturally into 3 sub-areas: the Western Ghats (DK+CM+TC), the Deccan Plateau (BD+TG), and the Eastern

Ghats—Carnatic (MP+RA+KT). The Western Ghats are further biogeographically divisible into the Dangs—Konkan sub-sub-area (from the Tapti River and the Surat Dangs highlands to the Konkan region and the ghats in Goa), Canara—Malabar (highlands south of Goa to the Nigiris and the north Canara and north Malabar coasts south to the Palghat Gap), and Travancore—Cochin (ranges south of the Palghat Gap from the Nelliampathies to the southernmost Ashambu Hills and the southern Malabar coast). The island of Ceylon is kept as one sub-sub-area, but its south-western highlands portion (the 'Wet Zone' of G.M. Henry, 1955, *GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON*) can be taken as the fourth division of the Western Ghats, whereas the lower, drier plains country forming the remainder of this island (the 'Dry Zone' of Henry) can be taken as part of the Tamilnad—Carnatic, or otherwise separately as the Ceylonese Lowlands. The Deccan Plateau is divided into 2 sub-sub-areas, the Bombay Deccan as the western half and Telengana as the eastern half. The Eastern Ghats—Carnatic sub-area, which is the most geologically ancient of our sub-continental landmass (the 'India Vera' of M.S. Mani, 1974) is further divisible into the Mysore Plateau, the Rayalseema—Andhra Carnatic, and the Kongunad—Tamilnad Carnatic, these

areas now in the Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu States, respectively, of the Indian Union. Readers will slowly find scientific logic in turning 'a blind eye' to political divisions for studies of bird (and other wildlife) distributions, and in adopting these biogeographical areas, sub-areas, and sub-sub-areas instead. I will try and help this transformation of thought and approach through my writings in Pitta.

[Errata in Letter 43 in Pitta # 120—Page 3: Text Para 1, Line 2 should read "non-academically obtained 'gift of honour' by him"; Para 3, Line 1 should read "the ornithological", Line 2 should read "I learnt a lot", Line 10 (last on p. 3) should read "to strengthen the"; Page 4: Para 1, Line 3 should read "of a nascent"; Para 2, Line 2 should read "point out the", Line 3 should read "who walked this", Line 9 should read "farm he purchased", Line 17 should read "nature education", Line 18 should read "to survey, sample, document"; Para 4, Line 10 should read "natural environment", Line 12 should read "as an academic" & "brought still needed", penultimate Line should read "species limits of our birds".]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com



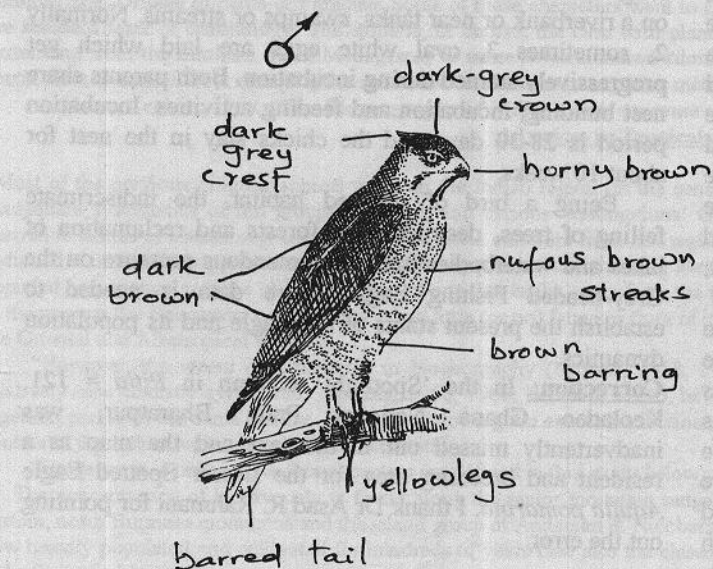
AI = ANDAMAN ISLANDS
AV = ASSAM VALLEY
BC = BASTAR—CIRCARS
BD = BOMBAY DECCAN
CA = CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO
CI = CEYLON ISLAND
CK = CUTCH—KATHIWAR
CM = CANARA—MALABAR
DK = DANGS—KONKAN
EH = EASTERN HIMALAYA
HK = HINDU KUSH—KARAKORAM
IV = IRRRAWADDY VALLEY

KT = KONGUNAD—TAMILNAD CARNATIC
LG = LOWER GANGETIC PLAIN
LI = LACCADIVE ISLANDS
MC = MAIKALA RANGE—CHHOTA NAGPUR
MI = MALDIVES ISLANDS
MM = MEWAR—MALWA PLATEAU
MP = MYSORE PLATEAU
NA = NAGA—ARAKAN HILLS
NI = NICOBAR ISLANDS
PD = PUNJAB DOAB
RA = RAYALSEEMA—ANDHRA CARNATIC
SP = SINDH PLAIN

SR = SATPURA RANGE
SY = SHAN STATES—YUNNAN
SZ = SZECHUAN
TC = TRAVANCORE—COCHIN
TD = THAR DESERT
TG = TELENGANA
TH = TRANS-INDUS HILLS
TI = TENASSERIM ISTHMUS
TP = TIBETAN PLATEAU
UG = UPPER GANGETIC PLAIN
WH = WESTERN HIMALAYA

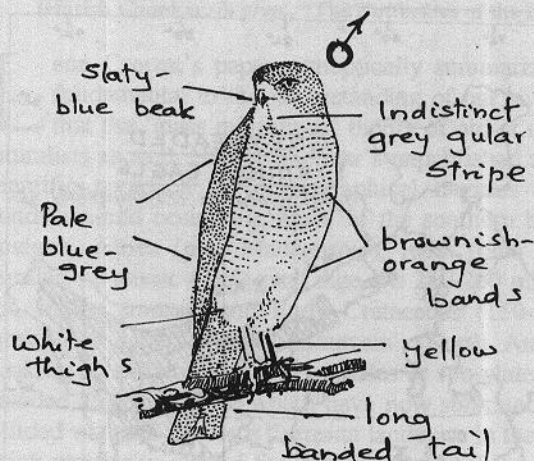
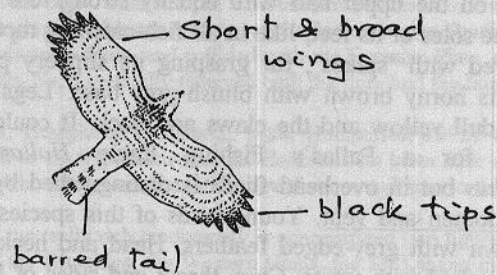
FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

Sparrowhawks (Genus *Accipiter*) are strong, swift hawks that prey on small birds and mammals. They are usually seen soaring or perched on vantage points in trees and other such elevated places. Adult birds are barred while the young are broadly streaked. Their tails are long and the wings are rounded.

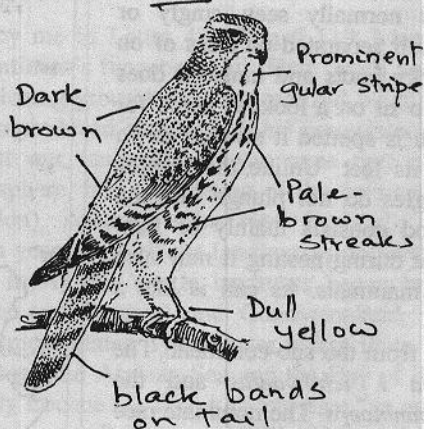


CRESTED GOSHAWK

(House Crow +)

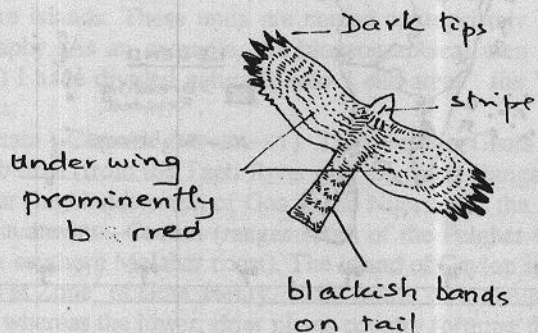
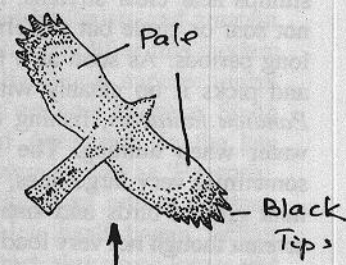


Juv.



SHIKRA

(House Crow -)



BESRA SPARROWHAWK

(House Crow -)

SPOTLIGHT: Grey-headed Fishing Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaeetus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

This is a large eagle (kite+) with a grey head and neck, crown and upper back light brown and the rest of the upper plumage dark brown. The breast is pale brown and the underbelly, vent and tail are white with a broad black terminal band on the tail. In overhead flight, the broad rounded blackish wings, brown breast, the white abdomen and slightly rounded tail with the broad black band are diagnostic. The Grey-headed Fishing Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaeetus* has powerful tarsi, which are feathered on the upper half with equally strong toes and claws. The soles of its feet, like in all fish-catching raptors, are covered with 'spikes', for grasping its slippery prey. The bill is horny brown with bluish-grey base. Legs are white to dull yellow and the claws are black. It could be confused for a Pallas's Fishing Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* but in overhead flight is distinguished by its white abdomen and vent. Young birds of this species are dark brown with grey-edged feathers. Head and neck are brown streaked with white. Chin, throat and sides of head are greyish and the breast and inner flanks are brown with white streaks. The belly, outer flanks and tail are white, mottled with brown.

This fish-eating eagle is normally seen singly or occasionally in pairs, sitting well separated on trees or on stumps near clear streams, rocky pools and tanks. It does not soar or circle but prefers to sit on a lookout perch for long periods. As soon as a fish is spotted it swoops down and picks it up cleanly with its feet. Unlike the Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, fishing eagles do not plunge into the water when hunting. The food consists mainly of fish, sometimes very large ones, but during nesting it may also hunt ground birds and small mammals. Its call is like a scream though not very loud.

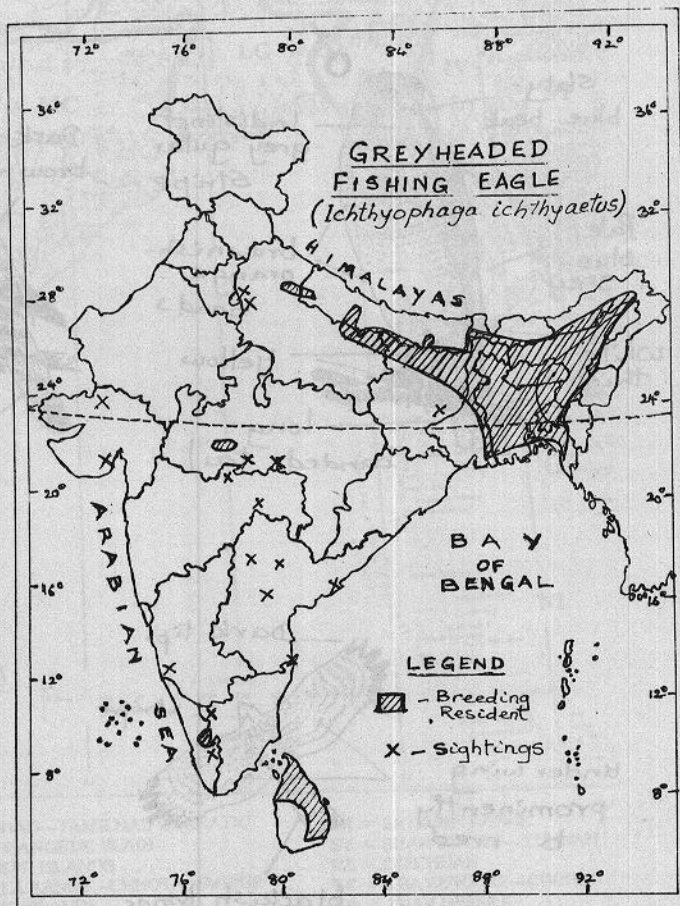
Two races are recognised from the sub-continent. The nominate race, *Ichthyophaga i. ichthyaeetus* and the endemic Sri Lanka race *I. i. plumiceps*. The nominate race is resident in small numbers, all over India, patchily distributed in selected habitats. It is more widespread and common in the northeastern states, in Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Bangladesh and, Nepal. There are occasional sight records from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, Salim Ali obtained a specimen from Mulug (Warangal District) in 1937. Elsewhere it has been seen at Coringa Sanctuary and Godavari Delta (East Godavari District), Pulicat lagoon (Nellore District), Nagarjunasagar (Nalgonda District) and Medak. Extralimital records are from Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and parts of Indonesia.

In India the Grey-headed Fishing Eagle breeds mostly in the northeast and Bihar. It also breeds in parts of Nepal. Pockets of breeding colonies are located at Periyar Lake and Thekkady (Kerala), Uttar Pradesh bordering western Nepal and, Madhya Pradesh. It breeds from November to

March. The nest is a large platform of branches, sticks and twigs lined with leaves about 10m-20m up on a large tree on a riverbank or near tanks, swamps or streams. Normally 2, sometimes 3, oval white eggs are laid which get progressively stained during incubation. Both parents share nest building, incubation and feeding activities. Incubation period is 28-30 days and the chicks stay in the nest for about 10 weeks.

Being a bird of selected habitat, the indiscriminate felling of trees, destruction of forests and reclamation of lakes and waterbodies has put tremendous pressure on the Grey-headed Fishing Eagle. More data is needed to establish the present status of this eagle and its population dynamics.

Correction: In the 'Spotlight' column in Pitta # 121, Keoladeo Ghana National Park, Bharatpur, was inadvertently missed out in the text and the map as a resident and breeding area for the Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*. I thank Dr Asad R. Rahmani for pointing out the error.



NOTES & NEWS

Continued from page 2...¹⁹⁷² Blackheaded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus reubeni* Abdulali 1976; Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps pallidum* Abdulali 1982.

Not in use: Rufousbellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra navarroi* Abdulali 1959; Whitebreasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus leucocephalus* Abdulali 1964; Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella andamanica* Abdulali 1964; Storkbilled Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis shekarii* Abdulali 1964; Alpine Swift *Apus melba dorabatai* Abdulali 1965; Bluebreasted Banded Rail *Rallus striatus*

nicobarensis Abdulali 1966; Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulula dharmakumarsinhji* Abdulali 1975.

Three species of birds (and at least one frog, *Nyctibatrachus humayuni*) are named after Humayun Abdulali. These are: Nicobar Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter virgatus abdulalii* G.F. Mees 1980; Nicobar Scops Owl *Otus alius Rasmussen* 1998; Redvented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer humayuni* Deignan 1951.

[BirdsofBombay Mailing List birdsofbombay@yahoo.com]

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

KRISHNA DISTRICT

Machilipatnam (CC)

24.iv: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 being mobbed by White-headed Babbler; BAYA CB, Small colony (<5 nests) beside road near railway station; BLACK-BREASTED WEAVER POB, lots of activity but no nests seen; STREAKED WEAVER CB, colony in Typha bed on Vijayawada road.

25.iv: BAYA CB, colony in Palm sp., outside village of Gilakaladhindhi. c. 26 N in different stages of const.

27.iv: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 2.

Manginapudi Beach

28.iv: LESSER SANDPLOVER 20+; TEREK SANDPIPER 4.

Kaikaluru

1.v: GREY HERON 87 on island in lake; LITTLE EGRET CB, 2 pairs N in trees next to lake; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA CB, 2 ad., 1 juv; PIED MYNA CB, 1 pair N in tree; BAYA CB, small colony, 5-10 nests.

Kolleru Lake

1.v: GREY PELICAN C100; PAINTED STORK 22; OPENBILL STORK C. 420; WHITE IBIS 7; GLOSSY IBIS 4; AVOCET 2.

16.v: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 3.

Polatthippa mangroves

18.v: OPENBILL STORK 2.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary (BH/PP/RL)

3.v: LITTLE GREBE CB ad., with 2 yng; BLACK-HEADED IBIS 50; SPOONBILL 26; LESSER WHISTLING DUCK 6; SPOTBILLED DUCK c. 700; COMB DUCK 40; PAINTED STORK 6; BLACK-NECKED STORK 2; SARUS CRANE 2 pairs; AVOCET 18.

ROHTAK DISTRICT

Sampla Pond (AB/TK)

26.v: LESSER WHISTLING TEAL several.

SONIPAT DISTRICT

Mohamedabad Village Marshes (SCS/SS/AB)

29.iv: BLACK-NECKED STORK 1; BLACK-HEADED IBIS 9; SARUS CRANE 2; BAILLON'S CRAKE 1; PURPLE MOORHEN several, CB, 3 yng; RIVER TERN PRB 1 br., plm; BENGAL BUSHLARK 3 display dance; BLUE-THROAT (red-spotted) 3 M.

2.v: BLACK-HEADED IBIS 20; SARUS CRANE 7; BLACK-BELLIED TERN POB, 1 in br., plm.

6.v: PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 8+2 br plm+ 1 nbr plm; PAINTED SNIPE 2 pairs; STONE PLOVER CB 1 pair with 2 eggs.

7.v: BAYBACKED SHRIKE CB, 3 yng in N 11' up in *Acacia arabica*.

13.v (AB/BH/CH/JK/SCS): CHESTNUT BITTERN 2; BLACKNECKED STORK 2; SARUS CRANE 2+2+3+1 juv; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 12 in br., plm; SIND SPARROW 3 M, 2 F, CB a pair const., N 8' up *Acacia arabica*.

19.v (SCS): CHESTNUT BITTERN 1; RED-HEADED MERLIN a pair; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA PRB 19+2+3 all in br., plm; SIND SPARROW 2 F.

Drain Number 8 (SCS)

2.v: POND HERON CB, 2 N c. 25' up 2 Mango Tree *Mangifera indica* Linn.

Juan Village (SCS)

2.v: PAINTED STORK 29+1+2+1; BLACK-HEADED IBIS 20; SARUS CRANE 7+2+2+2; BLACK-WINGED STILT c. 100; SIND SPARROW 2 M, 2 F on *Acacia arabica*.

Misc. village ponds including Chhota Thana Irrigation Rest House (AB/SCS)

27.v: GREY HERON CB 2 N40' up Mango tree; BLACK-NECKED STORK 1; EGYPTIAN VULTURE 2+2+2+1+1+1; SARUS CRANE 14+3; SIND SPARROW 1 M; BAYA CB several N under const; BLACK-BREASTED WEAVER CB, several breeding in reeds; STREAKED WEAVER CB, several breeding in reeds.

DELHI

Okhla 6.v (ND)

PAINTED STORK 12; RIVER LAPWING POB, 1 pair mating; STONE PLOVER CB, bird with 2 eggs on ground.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai Wetland (BH)

3.v: BLACKHEADED IBIS 10; SPOTTED REDSHANK c. 100; WHISKERED TERN POB, several in br., plm.

6.v: BLACKHEADED IBIS 32; GLOSSY IBIS 30; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 4; SPOTTED REDSHANK 200 br., plm; CURLEW-SANDPIPER 15; PAINTED SNIPE 3 pairs; AVOCET 40.

18.v (BH/PP/RL): GLOSSY IBIS c. 50; FLAMINGO 1 dead bird; LESSER SAND PLOVER 11, several in br., plm; PAINTED SNIPE 9; BLUE-CHEEKED BEE-EATER several.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore city

22.iv: LITTLE CORMORANT c. 50 ad. & imm. 5-6 nests in each of 4 Jackfruit trees and 1 Tamarind *Tamarindus indicus*; NIGHT HERON c. 200 ad., 200 imm. 1 or 2 N with yng., in each of 50 Silver Oaks *Grevillea robusta* A. Cunningham & 4 Jackfruit Trees *Artocarpus integra* (Thumb.) Merrill.

18.v (JN Prasad): MAGPIE-ROBIN CB, M frequently carrying winged insects to yng., inside leaf base of Sago Palm *Caryota urens* Linn. N c. 7m up, was not inside a hole but in the base of the palm leaf. 19.v: M making 2 trips to N within 5 minutes.

19.v: SMALL GREEN BARBET POB, entering hole c. 3m up Rain Tree *Samanea saman* Prain.

Hoskote tank

29.v (BW): GREY HERON 100; PURPLE HERON 10; PAINTED STORK 1; OPENBILL STORK 20; WHITE STORK 40; WHITE IBIS 40; SPOONBILL 20; SPOTBILL DUCK 400; COOT 100; BLACKWINGED STILT 60; BLACK-BELLIED TERN 20.

Indian Institute of Science

30.v: WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 6 OH. (Ulhas Rane)

Kothanur village (near)

21.ii: GREAT INDIAN HORNE OWL CB, 1 ad, 2 yng. (1 died 10 days later).

Lalbagh

8.iv (ST): HOUSE CROW 1 bird repeatedly flying from a perch on a tree to the water surface, its beak & feet touching the water each time. Was it trying to pick something from the water? JUNGLE CROW Several. POB, 1 carrying long dry twigs to the grass toward the lake.

13.v (UR/JNP/BW): LITTLE GREBE a pair const., N with Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* in the middle of the tank; INDIAN MYNA CB, ad., carrying food. Another frequenting a hole in a dead palm; JUNGLE MYNA CB, coming out of a N-hole 10m up a Rain Tree *Enterolobium saman* Prain.

Malleshwaram

12.v (NB/SB): PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD CB, 1 N with 2 yng c. 2m up a Pomegranate *Punica granatum* Linn.

Medahalli Lake

26.v (BW): GREY HERON CB, 100 N with yng. NIGHT HERON 80, CB, 4 imm.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Ranganathittha Bird Sanctuary

17.ii (KN/SN/UHK): COPPERSMITH CB, feeding yng in a N-hole on a Siris tree *Albizia lebbek* Benth.

(U. Harish Kumar/Koushik Nandy, Sumana Nandy, Atanu Mondal) 1.v: DARTER CB, juv., seen; POND HERON CB, several N with yng. MEDIAN EGRET CB, N with 2 yng. PAINTED STORK CB, ad., carrying N-mat. Several juv., seen; OPEN-BILLED STORK CB, 5 N with yng. CLIFF SWALLOW several hundred. CB, birds visiting & leaving N carrying something in their bills.

Bandipur National Park

3.iii (AM/KMBP): MAHRATTA WOODPECKER 1 N with chicks 2'

up a Dwarf Tree sp? in scrub forest. N destroyed by urchins who got attracted after attempted nest photography.

23.iii: Dry deciduous forest in core area. COPPERSMITH CB, N c. 40' up. Ad., carrying food to yng.

15.iv: GREY-HEADED MYNA CB, const., N c. 8m up in *Anogeissus latifolia* Wall.

7.v: Black bird adult carrying feed;

KERALA

WYNAAD DISTRICT

Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary

27.iii: (AM): MALABAR GREY HORNBILL CB, 1st N c. 22m up a *Lagerstroemia lanceolata* tree. N-hole sealed with F inside and lots of bird droppings below N. 2nd N c. 20m up another similar tree. N-hole sealed with F inside.

30.iv: MALABAR TROGON N-hole c. 2m up a Flame of the Forest *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Kuntze, in mixed deciduous forest. 3 white eggs with pale brown uneven & irregular tiny blotches. On 1.v: only 2 eggs in N, F incubating.

TAMIL NADU

NILGIRIS DISTRICT

Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary

14.iv (AM/N): BAY-BACKED SHRIKE CB, N c. 2m up an *Acacia* sp. with 4 eggs.

Masinagudi

14.iv (AM): WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER CB, N-hole c. 1.5m up a cut earthen bank next to tar road.

16.iv (A/AM): WHITE EYE 1 N with yng., in *Cassia siamea* Lam.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; c.-approximate/ly; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



IP TCA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 124: August 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed 12.8.2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 19-viii-2001: Moinabad Kanchas (Grasslands): 6-10km from Chilkur. Rajeev Mathew promises sandgrouse and other grassland birds by the 'bushel'. We start from Chilkur Deer Park entrance at 3.30pm sharp. Personal transport is essential to reach the place. Car-pools and pillion riders should be organised by members. Carry water and snacks. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 20-viii-2001, 6 p.m.: Film. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

On English Names, Scientific Nomenclature and Systematic Listing

Edward Dickinson

[EDITORS' NOTE: Edward Dickinson is presently editing a revised edition of *A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World* by Richard Howard and Alick Moore. Aasheesh Pittie asked him about English names of birds, systematic listing and scientific nomenclature, from an amateur Indian ornithologist's point-of-view. His reply is full of insights and wisdom.]

“Your choices will be your own, of course. However, I offer you the following comments for what they are worth. I like the old saying “if it ain't broke don't fix it”. In other words you should minimise your own workload in this context if you can.

“ENGLISH NAMES. Use what your readers in India will be comfortable with. A recommended world list will come out of the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) meeting in Beijing next year, but it can only be recommendatory. The test will come when we see how many journals ask writers to respect it “whenever possible”. Personally, I think this should be seen as a first public draft and a 4-year period of wide consultation should be announced with a revised list after that. After all the only real consultation so far has been within a selected group of people prepared to put up with the hassle and illogical argument of the listing process. Mostly people are following the *Handbook of Birds of the World* (HBW) or Clements' *Checklist* [or even of Howard and Moore (H&M)—and that will move very close to HBW and Clements and also adopt Oriental Bird Club (OBC) names for many birds not yet covered by HBW]. In reality I think more people see those than anything that IOC does. As far as H&M is concerned I was offered access to and the right to draw upon the IOC list and I refused it on the grounds I wanted to see it published first and also that I wanted to

use this edition to make some contributions in cases where I think the issue is unresolved. I am absolutely not going to waste my time trying to dream up new names (except in very exceptional circumstances as I think there are almost always enough good ones around and the problem is usually that the best of them has not been selected). BUT I have said that when the following Edition of H&M is in hand we shall want to base ourselves on the IOC list (note base on not wholesale acceptance). That's when I'll sit up and take notice.

“SCIENTIFIC NAMES. It is important to use the same source for names as you use for the authors and dates. Otherwise where are you going to check to see that you actually have the same name from the same author? For example there several occasions where the (exact) same name was given to the same bird by two different authors. In the case of India I think of names that were given by Gould and by Moore where Gould probably thought that Moore's name was already in press and would be out first. Sometimes that worked out right but on other occasions it didn't. On this ground OBC Check-list rules itself out simply because you can't be sure the two sources tie together properly. It's a fine list for the twitcher though. Be aware that whatever list you use will have some mistakes in it (the commonest will have to do with dates of authorship and with the original orthography of the name or the application of the ICZN Code (International Council for Zoological Nomenclature) as that affects nomenclature. That is why it is better to just say “Fine but that's the list we use, we can't afford to revise and reissue it”.

“SEQUENCE. I am not personally a fan of the Sibley & Monroe (S&M) sequence. I concede that they got a lot right, but we are some way from having an agreed standard and using S&M (as did OBC) in the meantime just complicates life for us older codgers, who know where to look to find a group in the older books, and have to hunt

to find it in the "new order" books. In ten or twenty years time we shall look back at a period of confusion and regret it. If I really thought the S&M sequence will stand the test of time I might make more effort to use it but it is clear that it will change in major ways as new molecular studies are not always supporting the results Sibley got with his techniques. The best lists (e.g. AOU Check-list, 1998) are saying they will accept molecular studies when they are supported by other studies including morphological ones, but also, more than just potentially, including voice and behaviour.

"The consequence for me, were I in your shoes, would be to use Ripley (1982) as the baseline for scientific names and sequence. As the same names and sequence are essentially followed in Ali & Ripley (*Handbook*) there must be a fairly widespread availability of these to your authors.

"You do not need to worry about or use the numbers (serial numbers in Ripley's *Synopsis*). They were great before computers as they were pegs to hang things on. Now we have word search capability!

"Whether you use Ripley's English names—I gather you don't like the OBC ones (which are perhaps the one contribution from the OBC team which I do value)—depends on how well accepted they are. But wouldn't it be nice to work from one source? Otherwise you have to compile your own standard composite list and perhaps even issue it to your authors!"

Inland Wetlands of India

The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore (SACON), is initiating an ambitious project, "Inland Wetlands of India," with a primary objective of preparing a protected area network of wetlands in the country. BSAP is privileged to be associated with this project, which will involve a one-day training workshop in September/October and fieldwork between December 2001 and January 2002. This project is somewhat similar to the Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Census. This is a prestigious collaboration for the Society and members are requested to participate enthusiastically. Send your confirmations to the Hon. Secretary of the Society at the earliest to enable us to further proceed with the project.

Members' News

BSAP member Avinandan has joined the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun, for the M.Sc. course and Ritu Nanda has joined the Bombay Natural History Society as Conservation Officer for the "Hornbill Clubs" project in Hyderabad. We wish them the best.

Rishi Valley Bird Preserve

In a world where habitat degradation is the order of the day, Rishi Valley School's example of habitat renewal is a shining (verdure) illustration of human resolve and commitment. In 1980, 150 acres were given to Rishi Valley by the state government for afforestation. The

missionary zeal that Mr Naidu and Mr Rangaswami brought to this project resulted in the area being declared a Bird Preserve in 1991. A moment of rare inspiration spurred Mr Rangaswami to start an Institute of Bird Studies and Natural History and offer a sumptuous and enlightening 2-volume based Home Study Course in Ornithology that he wrote in a few months of feverish activity. The numbers enrolled, though substantial, do not measure its success. The letters of appreciation and gratitude that the Institute receives from students, who have completed the course, do. Rishi Valley celebrated a decade of the Bird Preserve in July this year, with a small function in which a third volume of the study material (also authored by Mr Rangaswami) was released. This contains material on the living bird, while the earlier two volumes were on the science of Ornithology. Congratulations to these men and this singularly unique endeavour and strength to their elbows!

Threatened Birds of Asia

Occasionally, ornithologists drop into Hyderabad, like storm-blown pelagic birds. One such was Stephen Parr, International Officer of The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK), on his way to Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. At a hastily arranged meeting he gave members a slide show on the birds of Seychelles. He spoke of how the endangered Seychelles Magpie-Robin was nurtured from the verge of extinction to its present, safer population. Members learnt, in a nutshell, about island biogeography and the threats of island invasions and colonization by exotic species.

There was also a special reason for Steve's trip. He presented the BSAP with a set of the monumental and sobering 2-volume, 3,038 pages strong, *Threatened Birds of Asia*, published recently by BirdLife International. Sobering because it lists 128 species of threatened birds from India alone of which 8 are 'critical', 10 'endangered', 55 'vulnerable', 1 'conservation dependent', 52 'near threatened' and, 2 'data deficient'. In his introductory speech, Zafar-ul Islam, IBA Officer at BNHS said that the BSAP is the first NGO in India to be gifted these volumes in appreciation of the work done by the Society. Accepting the tome on behalf of BSAP, a grateful President, Siraj Taher remarked, "let's hope that when we meet next time, these will be lighter." Which speaks 'volumes' of the work all of us have at hand.

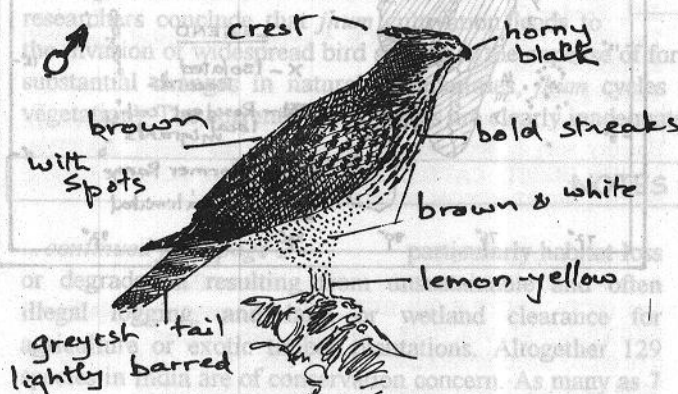
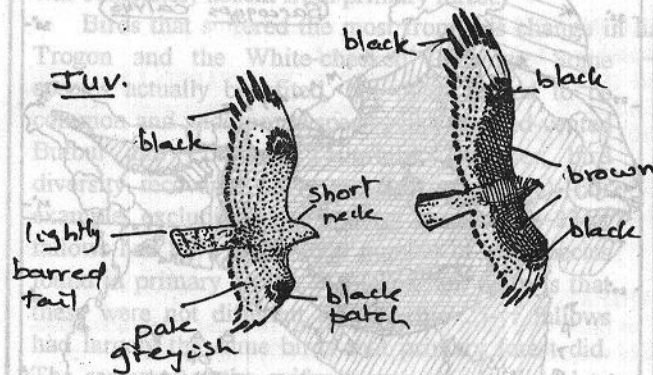
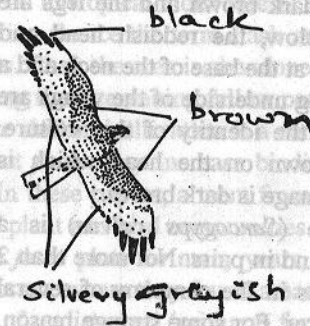
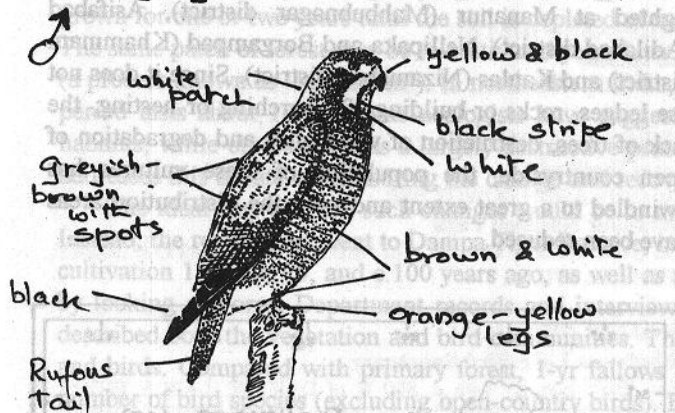
In a subsequent press release, Zafar mentions, "Taking into account newly identified species, two rediscovered species and changes in status, the new assessment shows there are 323 threatened species out of the total of 2,700 bird species in Asia in 2001, compared with 340 in 1994, 287 in 1988, and 51 in 1981. Now the total is a shocking 12% of all bird species in Asia. All 323 threatened species are at risk of extinction from human activities, ...continued on page 5

FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

Buteo Hawks also called Buzzards: These are medium-sized hawks with rounded wings and fan-shaped tails. They resemble eagles but are smaller. Identification in the field is very difficult as there are several colour phases from dark brown to very pale birds with several intermediate phases in each species.

WHITE-EYED BUZZARD

(Jungle Crow ± — 43 cms.)

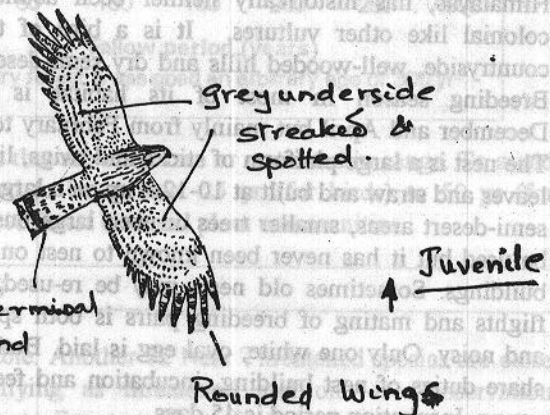
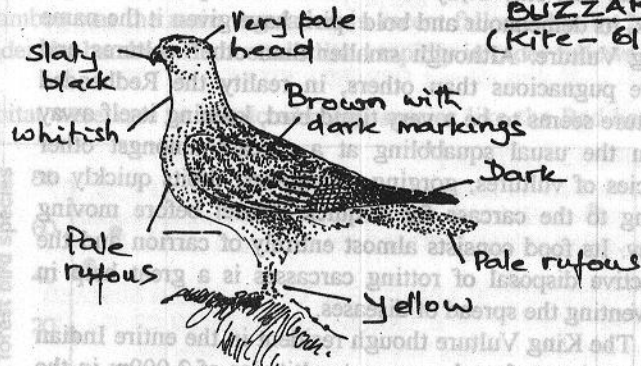


CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE (Pale morph)

(Kite + — 72 cms)

LONGLEGGED BUZZARD

(Kite — 61 cms)



Juvenile

SPOTLIGHT: Redheaded (or) King Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

This is a large vulture, overall glossy black with brownish on the lower back and shoulders. Its head and neck are bare and meaty-red in colour and similar coloured wattles hang below each 'ear'. There are white patches on its breast and thighs and also at the base of the neck. Its crop looks brownish. The beak is dark brown and the legs are fleshy-red. In flight, from below, the reddish head and neck, white patches on thighs, at the base of the neck and a broad greyish-white band along underside of the wings are very conspicuous pointers to the identity of this vulture. Juvenile birds have white down on the head which is pinkish coloured. Overall plumage is dark brown.

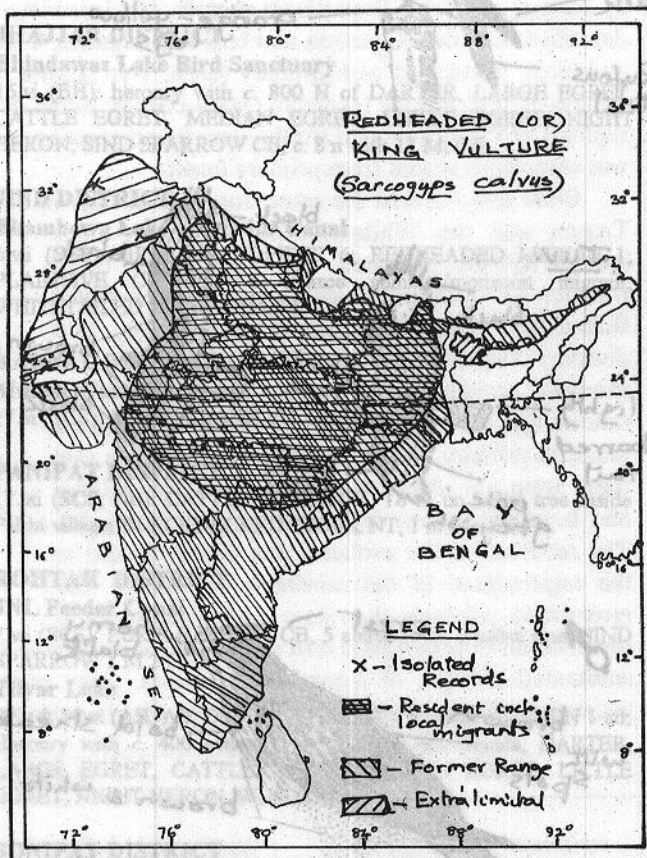
The Redheaded Vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*) is a solitary bird or at the most found in pairs. Not more than 2 or 3 will be found at a carcass in the company of several birds of other species of vultures. For some strange reason, this bird is held in awe by other species which give it great respect and move away when it comes to feed at the carcass and stay away till it feeds and departs. Its regal walk, its demeanour and bold spirit have given it the name King Vulture. Although smaller than other vultures and more pugnacious than others, in reality the Redheaded Vulture seems to be a very timid bird, keeping itself away from the usual squabbling at a carcass amongst other species of vultures, gorging on choicest titbits quickly or going to the carcass for a quick morsel before moving away. Its food consists almost entirely of carrion and the effective disposal of rotting carcasses is a great help in preventing the spread of diseases.

The King Vulture though resident in the entire Indian sub-continent, found even up to altitudes of 2,000m in the Himalayas, has historically neither been abundant nor colonial like other vultures. It is a bird of the open countryside, well-wooded hills and dry semi-desert areas. Breeding season in most of its habitat is between December and April but mainly from February to March. The nest is a large platform of sticks and twigs, lined with leaves and straw and built at 10-12m up on a large tree. In semi-desert areas, smaller trees or even large bushes may be used but it has never been known to nest on cliffs or buildings. Sometimes old nests may be re-used. Display flights and mating of breeding pairs is both spectacular and noisy. Only one white, oval egg is laid. Both parents share duties of nest building, incubation and feeding the young. Incubation period is 45 days.

The Redheaded Vulture is found throughout India, Bangladesh and Sikkim. Extraliminally it can be found in Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand and Indonesia. It is not found in Sri Lanka. It is well distributed in its entire range, but never numerous. Recorded from Madhya

Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Bihar, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and surrounds, Gujarat and Kerala. There are no published records available from other areas.

In Andhra Pradesh, historically (1914) it has been recorded nesting in Navipet (Nizamabad district) and Akkamapet (Ramakkapet, Medak district). Elsewhere sighted at Mananur (Mahbubnagar district), Asifabad (Adilabad district), Nellipaka and Borgampad (Khammam district) and Kaulas (Nizamabad district). Since it does not use ledges, rocks or buildings for perching or nesting, the lack of trees, destruction of woodlands and degradation of open countryside, the population of these vultures has dwindled to a great extent and even the distribution areas have been reduced.



LITERATURE REVIEW

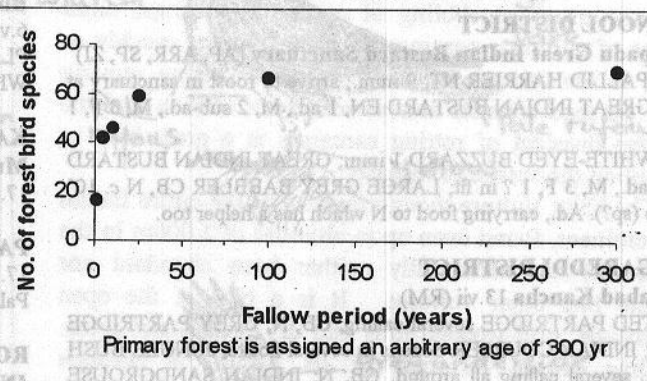
In this new column, Suhel Quader reports on important recent papers on Indian birds that are published in international journals and are thus relatively inaccessible to local birders.

1. Raman, T.R.S., Rawat, G.S., and Johnsingh, A.J.T. (1998): Recovery of tropical rainforest avifauna in relation to vegetation succession following shifting cultivation in Mizoram, north-east India. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 35: 214-231.
2. Raman, T. R. S. (2001): Effect of slash-and-burn shifting cultivation on rainforest birds in Mizoram, northeast India. *Conservation Biology* 15: 685-698.

Shifting cultivation (or *jhum*) is a form of agriculture widespread in tropical moist forests of the world. Typically, a patch of forest is cleared by cutting, drying, and burning the vegetation (hence the term slash and burn agriculture). Crops are grown for one or two years until the soil is depleted of nutrients. Then the area is abandoned and a new patch is occupied. The same patch of forest may be re-cultivated years later. During the intervening fallow period, the vegetation grows back (a process known as 'succession'). In northeastern India, where shifting cultivation is a common practice, a typical fallow period lasts about 10 yr. Some ecologists have suggested that *jhum* may increase biodiversity because it creates new habitats, while others see it as a largely destructive practice. In these papers, a team from the Wildlife Institute of India addresses this debate by measuring the change and recovery of plant and bird communities after shifting cultivation.

The ideal way to track such changes would be to monitor *jhum* plots for many years, a difficult task to accomplish. Instead, the researchers went to Dampa Tiger Reserve, in Mizoram, where they found areas that had been left fallow after cultivation 1, 5, 10, 25, and c.100 years ago, as well as areas of undisturbed (primary) forest. (They estimated forest age by looking at Forest Department records and interviewing village elders.) In each of these areas, they measured and described both the vegetation and bird communities. They found that shifting cultivation has a drastic impact on plants and birds. Compared with primary forest, 1-yr fallows had 1/10th the number of tree and shrub species, and 1/5th the number of bird species (excluding open-country birds). Bamboo was the main vegetation in recent fallows, but by 25 yr, saplings of forest trees and shrubs were found growing under the bamboo. Bamboo declined rapidly in older fallows, and was completely absent from primary forest.

Birds that suffered the most from this change in habitat were rare or restricted-range species like the Red-headed Trogon and the White-cheeked Partridge. Some species actually benefited, but these tended to be common and widespread species like the Red-vented Bulbul and Common Tailorbird. However, bird diversity recovered fairly rapidly (see Figure). For example, excluding open-country species, the 25-yr fallows had 85% of the total number of bird species found in primary forest. An important point is that these were not different species: the 25-yr fallows had largely the same birds that primary forest did. The recovery of the avifauna was closely linked to the regeneration of the rainforest vegetation. The researchers conclude that *jhum* cultivation leads to the invasion of widespread bird species at the expense of forest species that are often rare or restricted in range. To avoid substantial changes in natural communities, *jhum* cycles would need to be at least 25 yr (for birds) to 50 yr (for vegetation). The current 8-10 yr cycles are clearly inadequate to conserve forest bird and plant communities.



NOTES & NEWS

... continued from page 2 particularly habitat loss or degradation resulting from unsustainable and often illegal logging, and land or wetland clearance for agriculture or exotic timber plantations. Altogether 129 species in India are of conservation concern. As many as 7 Indian bird species are listed as Critically Endangered, including the Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*), recently rediscovered, which have only an estimated 50% chance of survival over the next decade without concerted conservation action. A further 10 are Endangered and 57

Vulnerable. Another 52 Near Threatened species are close to qualifying as threatened and one is Conservation Dependent. For two Data Deficient species there are inadequate data to make an assessment, but these too may be at risk. 78 species of birds in India are threatened with extinction, with 7 listed as critical.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Chittoor Reserve Forest

15.i (SK): RUBYCHECK 1. *Rubythroat*

Horsley Hills

15.vii (AP, VS, MRC, SS): BLACK EAGLE 1; YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL 2; BROWN FLYCATCHER CB, 1 yng bird.

Rishi Valley Bird Preserve

15.vii (AP, VS, MRC): SPOTTED OWLET CB, 2 yng; COMMON WOOD SHRIKE CB, ad., feeding yng; TAILOR BIRD CB, 1 N c. 1' up unidentified plant. Ad., feeding 3 blind (day old?) yng.

Talakona

18.xii.2000 (SK): EUROPEAN ROLLER 1.

Tirupati (Srivaarimetlu)

18.xii.2000 (SK): EUROPEAN ROLLER 1.

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu 17.vi (KMR, RK, MS)

GREY PELICAN VU, 31; NIGHT HERON 500; CHESTNUT BITTERN 4; YELLOW BITTERN 2; PAINTED STORK NT, 2, CB, 1 N with 15-20 days old yng; OPENBILL STORK 250; WHITE IBIS NT, 210.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary (AP, ARR, SP, ZI)

30.vi: PALLID HARRIER NT, 9 imm., arrive to roost in sanctuary at dusk; GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD EN, 1 ad., M, 2 sub-ad., M, 3 F, 1 yng.

1.vii: WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1 imm; GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD EN, 1 ad., M, 3 F, 1 ? in fit; LARGE GREY BABBLER CB, N c. 10' up tree (sp?). Ad., carrying food to N which has a helper too.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Moinabad Kancha 13.vii (RM)

PAINTED PARTRIDGE several calling, CB, N; GREY PARTRIDGE CB, N; INDIAN COURSER dozens in several flocks; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL several calling all around. CB, N; INDIAN SANDGROUSE CB, ad., & 1 yng. Groups of 3-50+ totalling c. 1000-1500 in 3hrs.

DELHI

Delhi Canal (Harevali to Badli)

23.vi (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT, 10; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 57 feeding in paddies; SIND SPARROW 1 M and 2 F on Babul *Acacia nilotica*.

Okhla and nearby areas

3.vii (BH): CATTLE EGRET CB, 72 active N in large Babul; BLACKBELLIED TERN NT, 1; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 8 juv., on wires; BLACKHEADED MUNIA 8 uncommon.

7.vii: (AB): CATTLE EGRET CB, 30 active N on babul tree in Kherakhurd village and 28 N on another in Bakoli village.

Tuglaqabad

22.vii (ND): YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 1, uncommon.

Yamuna—Timarpur Water Works

7.vi (SCS/AB): YELLOW BITTERN PRB, several disp., over reeds; OPENBILL STORK 17; SHIKRA CB, ad., feeding 2 yng in N c. 30' up an Eucalyptus sp; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 61;

BRONZEWINGED JACANA 5 PRB, chasing one another); WHISKERED TERN 100+; BLACKBELLIED TERN NT, 2.

HARYANA

FARIDABAD DISTRICT

Surajkund

22.vii (ND): OPENBILL STORK 13 ad., 6 juv.

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai Wetland

6.vii (BH): ASIAN DOWITCHER.

Sultanpur National Park

6.vii (ND): Heronry of c. 70 N of GREY HERON, CATTLE EGRET, OPENBILL STORK.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary

15.vi (BH): heronry with c. 800 N of DARTER, LARGE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, MEDIAN EGRET, LITTLE EGRET, NIGHT HERON; SIND SPARROW CB, c. 8 n with 11 M, 6 F.

JIND DISTRICT

Bhambewa Lake & Sundar Canal

6.vii (SCS): GREEN SANDPIPER 6; REDHEADED MERLIN 1; PLAINTIVE CUCKOO 1 Scarce summer/monsoon migrant; WHITETAILED STONE CHAT 1.

KARNAL DISTRICT

Munak Water Regulator

17.vi (SCS): SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 1 on N.

PANIPAT DISTRICT

17.vii (SCS, AB): CATTLE EGRET CB, 18 N on babul tree inside Palrhi village; BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 1 in rice field.

ROHTAK DISTRICT

JNL Feeder Canal

7.vii (SCS): PURPLE HERON CB, 5 active N on a babul tree; SIND SPARROW 1 M 2 F.

Tilyar Lake

29.v & 12.vi (AH, AB, DS, SCS, TK, VMT): BLACK BITTERN 1 ad; Heronry with c. 400 active N in trees on the islands, DARTER, LARGE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, MEDIAN EGRET, LITTLE EGRET, NIGHT HERON, WHITE IBIS.

SONIPAT DISTRICT

4.vii (SCS): BROWN CRAKE 1 in Drain Number Eight.

6.vii (SCS): WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1, uncommon & declining; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 3 on Sisana-Gohana Road.

6.vii (SCS): SIND SPARROW CB, 5 N with 2 yng., nearby 8'-10' on babul trees near Kakroi village. SPOTTED MUNIA CB, N.

Mohamedabad marshes

2.vii (AB, SCS): SIND SPARROW CB, 4 N; SPOTTED MUNIA CB, 1 N on babul tree between Chitna and Juan villages.

3.vii (SCS, SM): CATTLE EGRET 18 N with yng., on babul tree inside Bajana village on private land; PAINTED STORK NT, 17; WHITE IBIS NT, 40+; SIND SPARROW 2 N c. 10' up on 2 different babul trees near Tewarhi village.

4.vii (AB, SCS): Heronry of 70 active N with yng., near Rohat village on 3 Neem *Azadirachta indica* & 1 Banyan *Ficus bengalensis* tree, destroyed on 14.vii LARGE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, MEDIAN EGRET, LITTLE EGRET.

7.vii (SCS): PAINTED SNIPE 1+1+1 F calling from nearby different ricefields.

21.vii (AB, AJ, SCS): CHESTNUT BITTERN CB, 2 chicks seen in reeds; YELLOW BITTERN CB, chicks hrd and seen in the reeds; BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 2+2 in paddies; SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 1 sitting on N, 2 const., N; GARGANEY 1 M; WATER-CKOCK 1 ad;

YAMUNANAGAR DISTRICT

Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary

18.vii (AB, SCS): BLACKHEADED ORIOLE several. Not seen in other parts of Haryana, only in Kalesar/Morni; JUNGLE MYNA 5 Not seen in other parts of Haryana, except Kalesar/Morni; THICKBILLED FLOWERPECKER 1 uncommon in other parts of Haryana.

KERALA

IDUKKI DISTRICT

Idukki 12.v (RM)

SHIKRA CB; COMMON BABBLER; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER; NILGIRI FLYCATCHER NT, sub-ad; PIED BUSH CHAT CB, ad., with yng. BLACKBIRD CB, a pair with 2 yng. CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH.

Munnar 13-14.v (RM)

MALAY BITTERN on stream beside 'Munnar Inn' at 6pm; LARGE GREEN BARBET; COMMON BABBLER; NILGIRI FLYCATCHER NT; NILGIRI LAUGHING THRUSH EN; CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH; RED RD'S PIPIT.

Thekkady 10-11.v (RM)

CORMORANT CB; LITTLE CORMORANT CB; DARTER CB; BLUEWINGED PARAKEET; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL CB, M feeding F and yng., grasshoppers, etc.; LARGE GREEN BARBET; CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH; RED MUNIA.

KOLLAM DISTRICT

Thennala 21.v (RM)

LITTLE CORMORANT 2; DARTER 1; CHESTNUT BITTERN; WHITENECKED STORK; RUFOUSBELLIED EAGLE feeding on a Giant Malabar Squirrel c. 70°-90° up unidentified tree; RIVER TERN c. 20; SKIMMER 8, Kalada Irrigation Project; GREEN PIGEON; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL called like cackling hen & yng responded with call similar to a chicken's on being caught; LARGE GREEN BARBET; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER; YELLOWBROWED BULBUL; COMMON BABBLER; NILGIRI FLYCATCHER NT; GREYHEADED FLYCATCHER; BLACK-AND-ORANGE FLYCATCHER NT; CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH.

KOTTAYAM DISTRICT

Kumarakom 9.v (RM)

CORMORANT CB; LITTLE CORMORANT CB; DARTER 80+, 50+ yng. CB, several N; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH.

PALAKKAD DISTRICT

Kawa

7.vii (PJ, RVG, DK, JKJ): GREEN BARBET 4+ in hunting party. First for Kawa. RACKET-TAILED DRONGO mimicking Crested Serpent Eagle, Large Woodshrike and Quaker Babbler.

Nelliampathy Hills 26-29.v (RM)

CRESTED GOSHAWK; BLACK EAGLE; RUFOUSBELLIED EAGLE PRB, pair calling and disp; ORANGEBREASTED GREEN PIGEON; GREEN PIGEON; IMPERIAL PIGEON; JUNGLE OWLET; MOTTLED WOOD OWL; FRANKLIN'S NIGHTJAR; MALABAR TROGON; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL; MALABAR PIED HORNBILL NT; GREAT PIED HORNBILL NT, CB, 3 separate N. 1 pilfered by locals. 1 M bringing Green Calotes *Calotes calotes*, grasshoppers, etc. 1 only F's bill seen through slit in N; RUFOUS WOODPECKER CB, N in ant's N; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER; QUAKER BABBLER; RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER; BLACK-AND-ORANGE FLYCATCHER NT; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER; NILGIRI FLYCATCHER NT; GREYHEADED FLYCATCHER; WYNAAD LAUGHING THRUSH NT; NILGIRI LAUGHING THRUSH EN; YELLOWCHEEKED TIT; CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH.

PATHINAMTHITTA DISTRICT

Perumthuruthy 17-20.v (RM)

MALAY BITTERN; CHESTNUT BITTERN; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 2; INDIAN MOORHEN; PURPLE MOORHEN; LARGE GREEN BARBET; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH.

THRISSUR DISTRICT

Choolanur Peafowl Preserve

8.vii (PJ, KJ): SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 5; BLYTH'S MYNA in drongo-dominated hunting party. First for Choolanur.

PUNJAB

KAPURTHALA DISTRICT

Harike Lake Bird Sanctuary²

8-10.ii (Ap): SPOONBILL 13; LONGTAILED DUCK 1; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 3; BLACKBELLIED TERN NT, 4; INDIAN SKIMMER VU, 24; EASTERN STOCK PIGEON VU, 30; RUFOUSVENTED PRINIA 1; SIND SPARROW common.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-commonly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR-critical; DD-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Ameen Ahmed (AA); Anand Prasad (Ap); Anil Bhola (AB); Asad R Rahmani (ARR); Atul Jain (AJ); Bill Harvey (BH); Deep Shikha (DS); Dipu Karuthedathu (DK); Job K Joseph (JKJ); K Mrutyumjaya Rao (KMR); M Seetharamaiah (MS); MR Chaitra (MRC); Nikhil Devasar (ND); Praveen J (PJ); Rajeev Mathew (RM); Ramana Kanaparthi (RK); Renju Jacob George (RJG); S Sridhar (SS); Stephen Parr (SP); Suramya Mudgal (SM); Suresh C Sharma (SCS); Swati Kukreti (SK); Tarun Kumar (TK); V. Santharam (VS); Vishwa Mohan Tiwari (VMT); Zafar-ul Islam (ZI).

NOTES: ² Harike is a Ramsar Site and spreads over 3 districts. Amritsar, Firozpur and Kapurthala (maximum).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST¹

[EDITORS' NOTE: The *Birding Notes* section of *Pitta* is posted on several mailing lists on the Internet. The following correspondence is gleaned from the delhibird@yahoogroups.com mailing list and reproduced with a few cosmetic changes. The subject appeared in *Pitta* # 122-123: 8.]

"Record of 40 White Storks as late as 29.v at Hoskote tank is interesting. Is it normal for numbers of this species to remain so late into the summer in Karnataka?" —Sudhir Vyas <sudhir_vyas2001@yahoo.co.in>

"You are right it's unusual. But last year we had very high rains and there were many tanks full and infact through out the winter even during the waterfowl count we did not come across many waders probably they all had dispersed. At times when the Hoskote Tank (one of the largest in Bangalore) dries up we have seen very unusual number of waders including storks, spoonbills, etc. In fact in a neighbouring tank called Anneshwara (near the proposed new International Airport) we had come across 93 white storks a few years back while the tank was rapidly drying up. The White storks were there like sheep grazing in fields. They were there only for about a week or so by which time the tank completely dried up."

—J.N. Prasad <jnprasad@usa.net>

"I have seen the Grey-headed Fishing Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* in Bandhavgarh National Park, Madhya Pradesh, in 1986-87 and again in 1992. It must still be there!

"I think it is a good idea to name the Bird Room in Bombay Natural History Society the 'Humayun Abdulali Bird Room'. I second your proposal and a signature campaign could be started if required." —Pratibha Pandey, Delhi.
[EDITORS' NOTE: See *Pitta* #122-123, June-July 2001 p. 6 and 2 respectively for pertinent matter.]

"We have started status survey of Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* in south Konkan with support from SANCF. Once again we have visited Vengurla Rocks (see *Pitta* #121: 1) on 6th June 2001 and the trip was very adventurous and exciting. The swifts rebuilt the nests using grass and there are 1 or 2 eggs or nestlings in each nest. We estimate that there are 5,000 nests in the cave.

"The Rock was crowded with terns and nesting was in progress. 300 Great Crested Terns *Sterna bergii*, 5 Lesser Crested Terns *S. bengalensis*, 800 Bridled Terns *S. anaethetus* and 150 Roseate Terns *S. dougallii* were seen."

—Vishwas Katdare, Secretary, Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra, Chiplun, Ratnagiri, Maharashtra.

"The *Pitta* No. 122-123 June-July 2001 to hand. It gave me a sad moment to read of the passing away of Mr Humayun Abdulali. He is no more with us to communicate with him for his expert views.

"I met him once at the Centenary Celebrations of the BNHS at Bombay. I had had letter correspondence with him before that, and when I introduced myself to him at Bombay, he beamed a broad smile uttering at the same time, 'so you are the Daniel from Tiruchirapalli?' We shook hands and conversed for some time on the Painted Snipe I had been writing to him about. Later he recommended to the Natural History section of the BBC, when they wanted to include Painted Snipe in their film. That however could not come off for the bird's behaviour patterns being quite testing and tedious. It stopped with correspondence. Since then Mr Humayun Abdulali and I were exchanging views on birds.

"Mr Humayun Abdulali, it seemed to me, was quite independent in his views, knowledge and forthright. His last letter to me was on 18 April 2000 where in he lamented the attitude of the doctorates, and the students who work for such a degree; that taxonomy work needed to be done on Indian birds; that, gameshooting gone, he would have to go '50 miles to get a sparrow'.

"Everytime I got his letter my spirit soared high urging me to do some field work. In his penultimate letter he wrote about the Loten's Sunbird I had informed him about, and the Rufous-tailed Lark that he wanted me to collect for him.

"While he had typed his earlier letters, the latest ones were handwritten and tediously wobbly. We have lost a great Indian Ornithologist, one who encouraged those who showed real interest in bird study particularly fieldwork.

"May his soul rest in peace."

—H. Daniel Wesley, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu

¹ Editors' Note: This, more suitable title, has been suggested by Dr Kumar Ghorpadé.

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

Editors' Note: Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's Letter will resume next month.

IP TTTA



17.1X.2001

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 125: September 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed Papers 22/7/2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16-ix-2001: University of Hyderabad, Gachibowli: Meet at 7am at the University main gate. Carry water and snacks. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.
INDOOR MEETING: 17-ix-2001, 6 p.m.: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

NOTICE (Dated 1.ix.2001)

Annual General Meeting for the Year 2000-2001

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh will be held on Monday, 21st October 2001 at 6.00pm at Vidyaranya High School, 'Green Gates', Opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad. You are requested to attend the meeting. Please treat this as the official Notice of the AGM.

AGENDA

1. Presentation of Annual Report by Honorary Secretary.
2. Presentation of accounts for 2000-2001 by Honorary Treasurer.
3. Appointment of auditors for the period 1st April 2001 to 31st March 2002 and fixing their remuneration.
4. Election of an Executive Committee under Rule 30.
5. Any other business.

Note: Only those persons who have paid their membership for the year 2001-2002 are eligible to attend the AGM and cast their votes. Members can pay their membership dues before the commencement of the AGM and attend the meeting.

TREE SPARRROW SIGHTED IN ORISSA

Dr. S.K. Dutta, Reader in Zoology from Utkal University, and the undersigned, were on a field trip to Kanjipani area of Keonjhar District. We have spotted the **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* for the first time in Orissa. We sighted these sparrows at Kanjipani village in Keonjhar district. The flock was found sitting on a Drumstick tree in this village, which is about 500m asl. Their call is quite distinctive from the common House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. As per the recorded list of sparrows in Orissa we had two species namely the Indian House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and the Indian Yellowthroated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*.

References to bird books indicate the occurrence of this species in the Eastern Ghats. The distribution map of this species as shown in *A Field Guide to Birds of India* by Krys Kazmierczak shows its occurrence in Andhra Pradesh. No previous record from Orissa had been reported. The list of birds of Orissa prepared by the Wildlife Wing of the Orissa Forest Department also do not list this species.

[Biswajit Mohanty, Secretary, Wildlife Society of Orissa, "Shantikunk", Link Road, Cuttack, Orissa <biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in>]

REVIEW: CALLS OF INDIAN BIRDS—AN AUDIO CASSETTE

Lieut. Gen. Baljit Singh

On the sixth day of Creation, the Bible tells us that, "God saw everything that he had made and, behold, it was very good." And that is how I felt all of the sixty minutes listening to the audio cassette, produced by the Nature Club Surat. After the cassette had played out, I shut my eyes and sat for long, the auditory resonances lingering in the ether around me. Yes, "it was very good."

Several days later, I replayed the cassette, three times over, for an objective assessment of the recording. I am no music aficionado but I do trust my senses to stimulate me when a quality recording pours out. Of the 58 bird calls recorded there is none of indifferent quality. I place three calls in average recording effect. Balance 55 recordings are of good quality. Sixteen calls have one to three other bird species chirruping in the background; no distraction from the main performer, rather lends to a more natural setting. There are thirteen recordings which carry background electronic-hum which is certainly unwelcome. By my judgement twenty six calls recorded are simply flawless. As an added attraction, the wrapper of the cassette doubles as a booklet with very attractive colour illustrations of all the 58 performing birds.

For technically the most perfect sound effect, I would put my money on the call of the Bluethroat. It comes out pure and straight from a total void as it were. On the other hand, the call of Common Crane and its echo in space so true to field realities is very well captured. The collective symphonies of the calls of the entire flock taking to wing is ethereal (I have a nagging doubt here whether this call is of the Demoiselle Crane?). But for a crisp, reverberating and lingering effect the recording of the Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpecker is in a class by itself.

All kudos to Nature Club Surat (81, Sarjan Society, Surat 395007) for this excellent offering at just Rs125. I have no doubt, given wider notice of its existence the cassette will run into several reprints. And I wish that Nature Club Surat would be encouraged, cajoled, need be even bullied, by

nature lovers to get on with the compilation of volume II of the series, promptly.

Announcement: Researchers Required

"Applications on plain paper are invited along with bio-data and attested copies of mark sheets and certificates for the following research and supporting staff to work in the major research project entitled "Passerine birds versus floral syndromes and seed-dispersal in Eastern Ghats of Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh," funded by Ministry of Environment and Forests for a period of 3 years. The research project is fieldwork oriented and the candidates who are willing to work with dedication...only should apply. Applications should reach the undersigned on or before 5th September 2001. Posts available (1) Junior Research Fellow(s)-2 [Qualifications: M.Sc. Environmental sciences / Botany / Zoology with a minimum of 55% marks; NET qualification; Research experience. Salary: Rs.5,000/-+HRA (per month)]. (2) Technical Assistant-1 [B.Sc. with Biological Sciences combination; Computer and typing skills. Rs. 1,400/-+HRA]. (3) Field Assistant-1 [Xth Class. Rs. 1,375/-+HRA]." [Dr. A.J. Solomon Raju, Principal Investigator, MOEF Project, Department of Environmental Sciences, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam 530003. E-mail <ajsraju@yahoo.com>]

Taxonomy: a dying discipline in a dying world

N.J. Collar

Taxonomy precedes conservation. This is as basic as to say that language precedes education. The one is a precondition of the other. Without the formal structure of names and an agreed system of usage, there can be no understanding of what exists to be conserved. So, if taxonomy is simply the time-honoured chicken and conservation her newest-laid egg, any implied circularity in their relationship—the point about chickens and eggs being that you cannot say which came first—might appear whimsical. However, I believe there is an important sense in which that circularity—conservation engendering taxonomy no less than *vice versa*—is now a real phenomenon.

This new emphasis is a side-effect of the widely perceived "global biodiversity crisis" in which catastrophic depletion of the natural resources of our planet by entirely unsustainable and barely controlled patterns of human exploitation—"development" is an absurd word for it—is engulfing an unprecedented proportion of the world's animal and plant species in a man-made extinction spasm (Wilson 1992, May *et al.* 1995). Many (meaning millions) of these species are not yet known to science; many (meaning hundreds of thousands) are in the half-way house of knowledge between original description and a basic understanding of their habitats, biology and distributions: up to 40% of the world's 400,000 described species of beetle, for example, are still known only from their type-localities (Mawdsley & Stork 1995). The utter inadequacy of our knowledge (although of course it has always been the case

that the exploration of the planet has only ever been a subset of its exploitation) is a crippling disadvantage.

Consequently there is now enormous pressure on the discipline of taxonomy, whose services have never more urgently been needed; yet in one recent calculation (Soulé 1990), made by multiplying the number of tropic-specialised systematists on earth (1500) by the number of new species each describes per year (5) and dividing the result into the anticipated number of species awaiting description (30,000,000), it transpires that on present effort we will need to wait until the year 6000 before we have names for all the planet's species. Worse, this "present effort" shows no sign of maintaining itself for the next 40 years, let alone the next 4000: 23% of teachers of systematic biology in the U.K. were 35 and under in 1980, falling to 8% in 1990 (Gaston & May 1992). Indeed in the 20-year period after 1975 the sub-department of Ornithology at the British Museum (Natural History) lost over half its staff, and more significantly some 90% of its research capacity (R. P. Prys-Jones, pers. comm.). This is the institution that houses by far the greatest amount of ornithological reference material on earth, yet now employs not a single full-time in-house taxonomist and has undertaken no exploration or collecting work of any coherent description since the Mount Nimba enterprise a quarter of a century ago (see Colston & Curry-Lindahl 1986). The situation is little different in virtually all the great old natural history museums of Europe.

Ironically, although the relative (and I stress: *relative*) completeness of avian taxonomy has prevented it from adding significantly to modern museum angst over function, direction and need, the current trend (perhaps a better word is thrust) appears to be one that will only add to the time it takes for a yet more complete ornithological world picture to be composed. Conservationists, however, may not be willing to wait; and I am inclined to think that their alliance with birdwatchers—a very strong link having been forged between the two in recent years—will be at least as crucial to the advance of avian taxonomy in the next few decades as any developments within formal academic circles. [From: Collar, NJ (1997): Taxonomy and conservation: chicken and egg. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 117(2): 122-136.]

The printing of this issue of *Pitta* has been subsidized by a generation donation from **Azad Reading Room**. Thank you gentlemen, may your tribe increase!

Ring Recoveries

A Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*, ringed (ring # DB26299) at Bird Island, Seychelles on 8th September 1997, moved c. 2,800km in 328 days and, was recovered on 3rd July 1998 at Vembanad Lake, Kottayam District, Kerala state, India. —B Sreekumar.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—45

"The fact of the matter is, of course, that we are all one on this tiny, shrinking planet. We all live within a common fragile envelope which we are busy plundering as we will, those of us who belong to developed nations as surely as those of us who knowingly or unknowingly do the same in less developed parts of the world.

"The essential thing to remember about conservation is that it is an international subject, a global problem. There is no question that no nation could afford to be parochial or assume that it is the keeper of the mysteries, the sole authority on the subjects, which happen to lie within its national boundaries.

"Dr Salim Ali and I recently went back to former study areas in Orissa, visited in the 1940s by both of us, only to discover that the creation of enormous areas of reserve forest, started seventy years ago as plantations for productive timber, had gradually eliminated most of the so-called 'miscellaneous forest' of the professional forester—considered useless by the trade—on which biological diversity depends.

"The salvation of a species should not depend on nationalist impulses, but rather on international understanding and coherent exchange of knowledge and international expertise flowing in and out."

"I am optimistic. I know cooperation is tending to become merely a slogan today. People do not like to cooperate; they do not like to communicate with each other. They seem to prefer to live in blissful ignorance. Environmental and ecological organisations must bestir themselves and tell their peoples, their governments, their industrialists and traders that here lies the means to serve the voice of truth. For, without cooperation there's no future for mankind." [S. Dillon Ripley interview, "All are interdependent", *Blitz special* 1(2): 41-42; 1984]

"The most crucial aspect of environmental study in the subcontinent today is the interface between human culture and the environment. Technology has not helped the foundations on which culture and human affairs depend.

"...it was a great mistake for scientists to adopt a parochial point of view on the work they were engaged in if it had a bearing on the world as a whole. Study of environment... had evolved from a scientific and theoretical study into an applied science—an applied problem, extending across the broad spectrum of natural sources, of utmost importance to human endeavour and survival.

"Birds serve as splendid and tell-tale marker species in the environment. Their presence denotes a certain combination of natural conditions, and the subtleties with which one comes to understand this distribution is directly related to the successional stages of the environment.

"A solid stand of sal forest is biotically very poor... Replacing the complex natural system by monoculture renders the subsoil pathetically deficient of organisms, chemicals supporting systems and micro organisms.

"Some of the virgin forest of the Forties in the north-east, in the Mishmi hills—the richest biome in the rainforest arc of mountains and riverine valleys ranging across northern Burma and upto south-west China—were today totally depleted, except in the inaccessible segments. Forest destruction has proceeded rapidly with a lopsided view of development. The level of technology and all the appurtenances of civilisation, tended to far outstrip the potentials of the area and to wipe out the simpler agrarian life.

"The decline in the forest cover in a State like Andhra Pradesh and its neighbouring south and west areas could be directly linked to the decline of rainfall and the resulting change in climate.

"Without a green army and a green revolution of action and understanding, it probably will be impossible to stem the tide of increasing environmental deterioration in this marvellous country." [S. Dillon Ripley lecture, "The present climate and environment of India—an essay in decline and fall", report in the *HINDU*, 10th January 1986]

March 12th this year marked the demise of Dr Sidney Dillon Ripley II, author of the *OLD* and *NEW SYNOPSIS* (1961, 1982) and co-author, with Dr Salim Ali, of the 10-volume *INDIAN HANDBOOK* (1968-1974); reference books that still are guiding lights to the majority of us Indian sub-continent bird watchers and ornithologists, in spite of the lavishly illustrated guide-books, with confusing names and sequences, that are lately the fancy of the more impressionably naïve among us. The *PICTORIAL GUIDE*, written by the above authors, who shared over four decades of companionship studying and writing about our birds, and by the artist John Henry Dick, is both the cheapest (Rs 370 compared to the *THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS* 'disguised' as Salim Ali's 12th edition which is priced at Rs 450, to the abridged *POCKET GUIDE* of Grimmett and the Inskipp at Rs 695, to Krys Kazmierczak's by far the most well researched and fairly accurate *FIELD GUIDE* at Rs 795, and finally to the bulky 'pretender' to being the authentic 'magnum opus' on our birds, the *SUBCONTINENT 'GUIDE'* of the Grimskipp, at Rs 2250!), and the most reasonably workable guide book on our bird diversity.

Dr Ripley signed my Smithsonian Postdoctoral certificate in 1983 as he was the then Secretary of this famed Institution in Washington, DC (U.S.A.) where I spent about a year and a half as their Fellow, studying particular flies (Insecta: Diptera) of our sub-continent. Apart from reminding me, through phone calls to my Advisors in the Entomology Department of the S.I., that I should hurry up with completing Insects section headwords for the *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIAN NATURAL HISTORY*, which was to be released as the Bombay Natural History Society's Centenary Publication in 1983 (but actually published in 1986), because Salim Ali was being urged by the General Editor R.E. Hawkins to ask Ripley to sound me on my delay, I never was able to speak with him, or even exchange any correspondence, chiefly because I was then deep into entomological researches, not birds, as earlier.

My examination of his *SYNOPSIS* and his species-limit judgements, his list of our endemics, and other bird matters, during the past decade of my return to Ornithology, have revealed many errors and inconsistencies in Ripley's research publications. I will shortly begin dissecting and analysing, taxon by taxon, our bird families, in my written 'Notes on Indian sub-continent Ornithology' which will be published in Indian and foreign journals. But, I cannot resist paying my heartfelt homage to a personality, though foreign, who regenerated life into our bird studies while based in the United States, after we had forced the British to depart from our shores and thus created a period of darkness and scientific vacuum until Dr Ripley arrived on the scene. Ever since I bought his *OLD SYNOPSIS* on 13th September 1965 (a week before Ripley turned 52) and began deciphering what then was "Latin and Greek" to me, I have spent many hours on his two *SYNOPSSES* which now carry

many of my pencilled notes and annotations. Here then is my brief analysis of his work, not of him, personally, since I did not know him in the flesh.

Looking at the several obituary notices and remembrances that are now appearing after the death of Humayun Abdulali, our native bird taxonomist of real worth (like also the late Biswamoy Biswas of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta), I see now only of three that have been published in India mourning or recollecting Dillon Ripley. First, as always, in April Pitta, which reproduced Bart Barnes' Obit, published in The Washington Post newspaper on 13th March. Then a brief 4-liner by K.V. Sudhakar in the Madras Naturalists' Society Bulletin of May, and finally a fine obituary piece, 2-page with photograph, by S. A. Hussain in the latest BNHS Journal (Vol. 98, No. 1) of April 2001. I haven't a clue about any other that have appeared on mailing lists on the Internet. The other good 'insight' on Ripley and his life with birds (mostly Oriental) was by Sálím Ali in his Chapter 19 on "Five other Men" in the FALL OF A SPARROW (pp. 179-184; see also index entry to Ripley on p. 263). This present bibliographic summary has been given here so that I can write about other subjects not included in the above references, which interested readers can consult.

Like Edward Dickinson common-sensically and wisely pointed out (Pitta 124: 1-2) the most logical and trouble-free "baseline for scientific names and sequence" for us is Ripley's NEW SYNOPSIS, predated by his OLD SYNOPSIS (1962) which appeared a full three decades after the last two volumes of Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA were released in March and September 1930. By then the subspecies concept, making "superspecies" of good species, had crept into taxonomic fashion (like the DNA craze has now) and Ripley dutifully continued with the confused species-limit judgements, after the much better ones of Jerdon (1862, 1864) and of Hume (1879) to Oates & Blanford's OLD FAUNA (1889-1898), building on the earliest scholarly benchmark of Blyth in his "Catalogue of the Birds in the Museum of the Asiatic Society" (1849). These SYNOPSISES, in my opinion, were Ripley's "believe it or not" (apologies to late M. Krishnan), his most valuable contributions to Indian Ornithology. Though the two SYNOPSISES weren't infallible and I myself see plenty of errors in them now, it was a progressive, primal step, for us to be able to keep updated with scientific names ("common" names are a lazy person's crutches because, before the OLD FAUNA, bird watchers talked and wrote in scientific nomenclature!). Sálím Ali could never have been able to do this, though Biswas had preceded Ripley with his little-known but impressive "A Checklist of Genera of Indian Birds" (Records of the Indian Museum, 50: 1-62, 54: 101-106; 1953, 1959). Perhaps Humayun Abdulali was capable of a taxonomic update, if he had been asked to do so? But, on the whole and in reflection, it was a great thing for Indian Ornithology that Ripley met Sálím Ali at the BNHS in 1944, hit it off with him and they then "hatched" a plan, together in the Mishmi Hills, to revise and update Stuart Baker's volumes of the NEW FAUNA (see JBNHS 48: 1-37; 1949 – this was when Italian and Japanese mist nets were first being used in India to trap birds). This was good science, international collaboration, which we badly need now; fifteen years later the OLD SYNOPSIS appeared and marked a renewal of interest in our bird studies; and seven more years later the first volume of the INDIAN HANDBOOK was published. Biswas reviewed and commented on Ripley's OLD SYNOPSIS in the JBNHS (59: 276-278, 60: 679-689; 1962, 1964) and on the NEW SYNOPSIS (JBNHS 82: 126-129; 1985) which latter was also reviewed by Roberts and by him, Grimmett and Robson (JBNHS 79: 387-391 & 82: 567-572; 1983 & 1986). But the most critical analysis of these SYNOPSISES was by Abdulali (1968-1992) in his "Catalogue of the Birds in the Collection of the Bombay Natural History Society" (JBNHS 65: 182 to 89: 71), now being continued by Saraswathy Unnithan, whom he had trained (JBNHS 92: 350 to 97: 240; 1995-2000), but which is still incomplete.

Ripley's work—fifty years of publishing on our birds from 1942-1991 (see his co-authored ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, pp. 246-251; 1994) resulting in some 70-80 papers, notes and one book "SEARCH FOR THE SPINY BABBLER: Bird Hunting in Nepal" (1952, reprint 1953 & 1978) which I had purchased in 1972, when studying at Delhi, from the English Book Store in Connaught Circus. Ripley served on the island of Ceylon during the Second World War as an Intelligence Officer and wrote several papers on its birds, including a detailed 50-page commentary on Avifauna of Sri Lanka. In 1948, soon after our independence, he began his series of "Notes on Indian Birds", the first in the JBNHS (47: 622-627) and continued with them in other foreign journals to part VII, which was published in Postilla (with an Erratum) in 1958. Many papers included names and descriptions of new subspecies (a total of 59 in 44 genera and 18 families) and two new species of Babblers, *Brachypteryx cryptica* and Ripley's Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis*, both from the Mishmi Hills in Arunachal Pradesh. The former, identified and named by him as a Thrush (Subfamily Turdinae of the Muscicapidae), was a major goof-up and it is now a junior synonym of a Babbler (Timaliinae) that was described and named by Edward Blyth as early as 1859, Tickell's Brown Babbler, species *tickelli* but variably assigned to the genera *Trichastoma*, *Malacocincla* or *Pellorneum* through its nomenclatural history. A related bird, named *Malacocincla abbotti krishnarajui* by Ripley and Beehler in 1985, from the Visakhapatnam Ghats of the Central Highlands biogeographical area, not the "Eastern Ghats" as incorrectly believed, is, according to me, a good species with disjunct distribution and reproductive isolation – I name it Krishna Raju's Babbler here, in honour of my good friend in Vizag, expert on the Ghats there in the erstwhile "Northern Circars". Of these 61 new taxa proposed by Ripley I would synonymise all but 17, giving him 28% validity, as we systematic entomologists evaluate a taxonomist's lifetime 'record'. Of these 17, besides the good species I recognize mentioned above, I would also give specific status to these three other taxa: *Xiphirhynchus intextus* or Ripley's Scimitar Babbler (in the Assam-Burma sub-area south of the Brahmaputra and west of the Irrawaddy), *Turdoides taprobanus* or Ripley's Babbler (endemic to Ceylon, see my Letter 40 in Pitta 117: 4), and *Anthus travancoriensis* or Ripley's Pipit (southernmost Western Ghats, from the Ashambu Hills north at least to the Palni Hills).

I tried evaluating all his new taxa but the first two presented such contrary judgements that I decided to wait and do a more detailed revisionary study, in good time. His *Arborophila torquata interstincta*, from the Naga Hills, is not recognized by

Howard & Moore (1984) perhaps because it is the same *asbatemani* of Ogilvie-Grant, inhabiting northern Burma and adjacent biogeographically similar areas, which I think is a good species. Ripley's *Treron phoenicoptera phillipsi*, an isolated population in south-east Ceylon (see Henry's BIRDS OF CEYLON pp. 242-243; 1955), and the other very similar "subspecies" of this green pigeon, grade clinally into each other and are difficult to evaluate, though earlier 19th Century authors described several of them as good species. Here lies the "fun with subspecies", as Abdulali once wrote me!

There have been three subspecies described and named for Ripley, which are: *Pellorneum ruficeps riplei* Deignan, from the Patkai Hills, *Pteruthius validirostris riplei* Biswas, a new name given to the preoccupied *erythropterus* Vigors, and *Aethopyga nipalensis riplei* Koelz, from the Khasi Hills. Ripley himself named some of his new taxa after the persons Phillips (*Treron*, as above), Caroline (*Ducula*), Edward (*Streptopelia*), Mayr (*Megalaima*), Maria (*Pericrocotus* & *Phylloscopus*), Krishna Raju (*Malacocincla*, as above, jointly with Beehler), Coe (*Stachyris*), Grosvenor and Livingstone (*Garrulax*), Gertrude (*Leiothrix*), Lewis (*Actinodura*), Alexander (*Horeitis*), Vaurie (*Parus*), Deignan (*Dicaeum*), Whistler (*Nectarinia*), and Koelz (*Aethopyga*). The patronyms "mariae" and "livingstoni" were for his wife, Mary Livingstone, who accompanied him on several of his field trips here and elsewhere. It is revealing, however, that Ripley did not name any new taxon after either Biswas or Abdulali, nor did these equally scholarly taxonomists name any of their own new taxa honouring Ripley!

Besides the bird faunistics of Ceylon, Ripley also worked on these other areas' avifaunas—Mishmi Hills, Nepal, Naga Hills, Simlipal Hills, Vizag Ghats, Upper Noa Dihing, and Bhutan, on which last country he co-authored a 207-page paper with Sálím Ali & Biswas (*Records of the Zoological Survey of India Occasional Papers*, No. 136). Ripley also wrote on the zoogeography of Indian region birds and on the origin of this avifauna, besides about our endemic taxa and those that were vanishing or extinct, plus reviews of several books of others on the birds of this sub-continent.

My main grouse with Ripley's work is his decision to omit Burma (and Afghanistan) from our area, thus discontinuing the sane tradition of the twelve FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA volumes, and of Hume's ten *Stray Feathers* volumes, and in doing so ignoring critical biogeographically similar databases for a good understanding and analysis of our sub-continent's avifaunal character. This has sadly continued in all the recently published guide-books, unfortunately. Also, I note with great regret that in his SYNOPSES Ripley curiously omitted to include the original citations of species names; perhaps this major error exemplifies his obsession (like his many contemporaries then) with trinomial (subspecies) names and the utter disregard for true species identities, the only taxon that is "real" in nature.

Now that Ripley is gone, like Sálím Ali, Biswas and Abdulali, the "Big Quartet" of post-independence Indian Ornithology, new specialists must take their place and advance the knowledge of our region's extremely rich bird diversity, hopefully collaborating internationally. It is about time experienced professional scientists 'conduct' this mass of amateur 'players', now burgeoning as bird watchers, and return some seriousness to our Ornithology using the manpower that Sálím Ali and Zafar Futehally popularized bird watching to—the "bird fanciers" of Hume. Bye, Dr Ripley.

[Errata: Letter 44 in Pitta # 122-123—Page 3: Quotation 2, Para 1, Line 3 should read "narrative stories"; Text Para 3 beginning "Ghats—Carnatic" should merge with Para 2 ending with "Eastern".]

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LITERATURE REVIEW By Suhel Quader

This new column reports on important recent papers on Indian birds that are published in international journals and are thus relatively inaccessible to local birders.

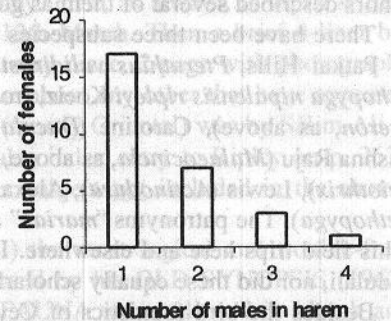
1. Butchart SMH. (1999): Sexual conflicts and copulation patterns in polyandrous bronze-winged jacanas (*Metopidius indicus*). *Behaviour*. 136: 443-468.
2. Butchart SHM. (2000): Population structure and breeding system of the sex-role reversed, polyandrous Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*. *Ibis* 142: 93-102.
3. Butchart SHM, Seddon N, Ekstrom JMM. (1999): Polyandry and competition for territories in bronze-winged jacanas. *J. Animal Ecology*. 68: 928-939.
4. Butchart SHM, Seddon N, Ekstrom JMM. (1999): Yelling for sex: harem males compete for female access in bronze-winged jacanas. *Animal Behaviour*. 57: 637-646.

Less than 1% of bird species are polyandrous (a mating system in which a single female pairs with multiple males). How do males and females behave in these unusual species? And why are they polyandrous in the first place? The answers to these questions are poorly known for Indian polyandrists, which include the buttonquails, the jacanas, and the painted snipe. Stuart Butchart, from the University of Cambridge, U.K., and colleagues studied the curious mating system of the bronze-winged jacana from 1995 to 1997 at Vembanur Lake in Tamil Nadu. Vembanur is about 18 ha in area, 85%-98% of which was covered with vegetation during the study. Birds were trapped in mist-nets, measured, and given a unique combination of colour-bands. The population size ranged from 41 to 62 jacanas in a season, with about twice as many males as females. Although males and females do not differ in plumage, females were larger than males in nearly all respects (including being 60% heavier).

The birds showed strong territorial behaviour. About half of the individuals present held territories, while the other half were non-territorial 'floaters'. Both males and females held territories and defended them primarily against others of the same

sex. When territory vacancies were created by artificially translocating individuals, the free space created was rapidly filled by members of the same sex – either by neighbours expanding their territories, or by floaters settling down. This indicates that there is strong competition for space within the sexes, perhaps arising from the limitation of floating vegetation.

The reproductive behaviour of the jacanas turns all conventional stereotypes about gender roles upside down. About 40% of territorial females were polyandrous, their territories containing multiple territorial males within them. The mean harem size of females was 1.5 males, the maximum being 4 (see figure). Peak breeding occurred in August, when water levels were high and relatively constant. Females typically mated with all their males before laying each clutch of eggs. The authors describe stereotyped calls, termed 'yells', that males give to solicit matings. Monogamous females mated an estimated 32 times per clutch, and polyandrous females 97 times per clutch. Matings peaked on the day the first egg of a clutch was laid. (In birds, eggs are fertilised 24 hr before they are laid.) In two cases, males destroyed their own clutch, apparently because they were uncertain of their paternity. Incubation was carried out solely by males, but nesting success was extremely low. About 95% of 18 clutches laid were destroyed by predators before hatching. The researchers suggest that polyandry may have evolved because of the advantage to a female of laying multiple clutches in response to high predation levels. This high cost of egg production may be difficult to bear unless females are emancipated from the duties of parental care.



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status* follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

DELHI

Delhi Zoo

2.viii (NSK, SCS): Heronry: LITTLE CORMORANT CB, 3 N on *Prosopis juliflora*; SMALLER EGRET CB, 44 N; NIGHT HERON CB, 46 N; WHITE IBIS NT, CB, 87 N, c. 200 birds incl., ad & juv.

North Delhi

30.vii (AB, SCS): Heronry: CATTLE EGRET CB, 70 N near Budhpur village on *Prosopis juliflora* and *Neem Azadirachta indica* trees.

23.viii (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT, 5 in wetland between Holambi Kalan and Khera Kala villages; SARUS CRANE VU, 2+1.

Okhla and nearby areas

29.vii (KBS, ND): ROSY PASTOR 2 adult + 1 juvenile; STRIATED MARSH WARBLER 1.

7.viii (NSK): BLACK BITTERN 1; REDHEADED MERLIN 1.

12.viii (KBS): STARLING 1 (earliest arrival so far); REDHEADED MERLIN 2 perched on electric pole.

19.viii (BH): BLACK BITTERN 1; REDHEADED MERLIN 2 on electric pole; BROWN CRAKE 1.

Yamuna (Timarpur Water Works)

30.vii (AB/SCS): BRONZEWINGED JACANA CB, 1 pair copulating + 2 juv., on water lilies.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)

Anjuna Seabird Watch

4.iii: WHITECHEEKED TERN POB, northward migration towards br., grounds begins.

24.iii: WHITECHEEKED TERN POB, migration towards br., grounds peaks with up to 170 birds per hour.

11.iv: WHITECHEEKED TERN POB, migration towards br., grounds ends.

12.vii: WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER 1, 300 mtrs offshore.

4.viii: BROWN-WINGED TERN 20, annual southward offshore mass-migration starts.

6.viii: SOOTY TERN 5 juv., annual southward offshore migration starts.

16.viii: WHITE-CHEEKED TERN 66 juv., annual southward offshore mass-migration starts.

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary

5.iv: CRESTED GOSHAWK PRB, courtship disp; SPECKLED PICKULET 1.

14.iv: MALABAR TROGON 6+; BLUEBEARDED BEE-EATER 1; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER 1.

Dudhsagar Top 20.iv

NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON VU, 1; GREAT PIED HORNBILL 1; SMALL YELLOWNAPED WOODPECKER 2; INDIAN GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 1; SOUTHERN TREE PIE 1; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER 4; BLUE CHAT 1 F.

Ilhas Wetlands 29.iv

PINTAIL 1 M; SPOONBILL 2; RUDDY TURNSTONE 1; LONGTOED STINT 1.

Chapora Estuary 30.iv

OYSTERCATCHER 1.

Tiswadi wetlands 7.vi

LITTLE GREBE CB, 4 chicks; PURPLE HERON CB, incubation and chicks on 31 N; LARGE EGRET CB, 70 N; LESSER ADJUTANT VU, 7; PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 2 N; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, 1 N, 1 chick; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING CB, 3 N; GREY PLOVER 10; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 8; TEREK SANDPIPER 3.

14.vii: INDIAN SHAG CB incubating; DARTER NT, CB 27 ad., 10+ N; WHIMBREL 13; CURLEW SANDPIPER 4; WHISKERED TERN 7 juv.; INDIAN RIVER TERN 3.

15.viii: LESSER ADJUTANT VU, 1; GARGANEY 1 F; OSPREY 1; LITTLE STINT 3.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary 1-3.viii

BESRA SPARROW-HAWK 1; MALABAR PARAKEET 1+; INDIAN EDIBLE-NEST SWIFTLET 1; MALABAR TROGON 1; CRIMSON-THROATED BARBET 10+; SPOTTED PICULET 1; PIGMY WOODPECKER 3; FAIRY BLUEBIRD 4+; WHITE-BELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER 1 pair.

HARYANA**GURGAON DISTRICT****Basai Wetland 15.viii (BH, ND, GS)**

BLACKNECKED STORK NT, PRB, a pair const., huge N c. 1m up dead tree standing in water, surrounded by Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes*; WHITE IBIS NT, 30; GLOSSY IBIS 20; GARGANEY c. 100; RUFF c. 3,000; COMMON REDSHANK c. 100; WOOD SANDPIPER c. 200; BLACKWINGED STILT c. 500.

Sultanpur National Park 5.viii (SCS, ND, PS)

Heronry as reported in *Pitta* # 124 (August 2001). WHITE-EYED BUZZARD-EAGLE 1 ad., 2 juv., calling 'tich-when-ee-ye'; SARUS CRANE VU, 2.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT**Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary 5.viii (SCS)**

Heronry: DARTER, LITTLE CORMORANT, INDIAN SHAG CB, c. 200 N; CATTLE EGRET CB, c. 800 N; GREY HERON, LITTLE EGRET, SMALLER EGRET, NIGHT HERON CB, c. 200 N; BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 2; SARUS CRANE VU, 2. BLUECHEECKED BEE-EATER PRB, 2 pairs entering N on sandy ground.

Gurgaon Canal 25.viii (SCS)

SIND SPARROW 1 M singing on a Babul tree *Acacia nilotica*; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB 1 near N 8' up babul tree.

Jhajjar-Farukhnagar Road 5.viii (SCS)

BLACK IBIS PRB, 1 bringing N-mat., to a N on 40' high electric tower; ROSY PASTOR c. 300 on roadside babul trees.

SONIPAT DISTRICT**Delhi Canal 23.viii (SCS)**

SARUS CRANE VU, 2+2 in paddies.

Drain Number Eight

12.viii (SCS): LITTLE BITTERN 1.

Fatehpur village pond 18.viii (SCS)

BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 3; PAINTED STORK NT, 22; SARUS CRANE VU, 3 in flight.

Juan Village 28.vii (SCS, SM)

SARUS CRANE VU, 2 in paddies; SPOONBILL 9 in paddies + 8 in flt.

Mohamedabad marshes

28.vii (SCS): BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 1 M, 1 F; SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 2 N with 1 bird sitting on each. 3+2 in flt +2 in paddies; SIND SPARROW 2 M in babul tree.

29.vii (SCS): RUDDY CRAKE 1 ad.

4.viii (SCS, SM): SARUS CRANE VU, 2+2+2; INDIAN PLAINTIVE CUCKOO CB, 1 chick being fed by YELLOWEYED BABBLER; BRISTLED GRASS WARBLER VU, calling 'tree-treue' from the tall grasses.

9.viii (SCS): BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 1+1; SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 2+1 on N +1 on N, +1; BRISTLED GRASS WARBLER VU, 1 calling nearly a dozen times from a *Jowar* field.

11.viii (AB, AC, ApC, RG, SCS): PAINTED STORK NT, 12; BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 3 ad; SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 1 on N, +1 on N, +1; BLACKHEADED MUNIA PRB, carrying N-mat., from reeds.

18.viii (SCS, SM): BLACKBELLIED TERN NT, 2+2 POB, in br., plm; RED MUNIA PRB, c. 30.

24.viii (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT, 4; BLACKNECKED STORK NT, 2; SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 2+2+2+1 on N, +1 standing near N; WHITE IBIS NT, 13 in paddies; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER c. 30 with juv., on electric wire; REDBACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius c. isabellinus* now *L. isabellinus*) on electric wire.

KARNATAKA**BANGALORE DISTRICT****Bagalur Lake (BW)**

15.vii: COMMON SANDPIPER 1 (2 weeks ahead of earliest expected time of arrival); PAINTED STORK 9 imm; WHITE IBIS 6.

Bangalore (BEL-Jalahalli circle) (JH)

27.vii: HOUSE CROW Albino 1, with normal House Crow. Every part of the albino was dull white. The bill was light brown with grey.

Bangalore: CPRI Campus (JH)

27.vii: INDIAN MYNA CB, 4 N with couple of hatchlings in each N. One cup-shaped N was on a HT tower with the risk of electrocution from a spark. N was moved with yng by c. 15m to nearby location at the same height but ad., did not accept. When it was moved closer to the original position by about 5m ad., accepted it.

Bangalore City

18.viii: JUNGLE CROW PRB N under const., c. 7m up *Alstonia macrophylla* tree amidst a busy traffic island near Hudson circle. (JNP)

Bangalore: Indian Institute of Science Campus 15.viii (JJ)

GREY WAGTAIL.

Bangalore: Rajmahal Vilas Extension 15.viii (UR)

GREY WAGTAIL 2.

Hebbal Tank 19.viii (DK)

SPOT-BILLED DUCK CB, a pair with 2 chicks. Another pair with 7 chicks swimming one behind the other between the two adults.

Hoskote Lake (BW)

4.vi: BLACK IBIS 10.

Jnanabharathi campus 12.viii (MSK)

SPOTTED OWLET 5 feeding on winged termite alates.

Kothanur Village (BW)

27.vi: GREEN PIGEON 80.

1.vii: BRONZED DRONGO 2.

9.vii: BLACK KITE 400 OH.

10.vii: LITTLE GREEN BEE-EATER 80 in 1 eucalyptus tree.

Lalbagh tank 12.viii: (DK)

COOT CB, 2 N; 1 N under const; other with a very young chick; An imm., also seen.

Lingarajapuram 19.viii: (CF)

HOUSE CROW pair feeding 3 KOEL fledgelings along with a HOUSE CROW fledgeling all perched on a Rain Tree.

Magadi road 5.viii (DK)

EGYPTIAN VULTURE 2 ad., + 2 juv.

Rampur Village Lake (BW)

1.iv: JACK SNIP 1.

31.vii: WATERCOCK 1 M br., plm.

HASSAN DISTRICT**Bangalore-Mangalore NH No.48 (c. 30km before Belur Cross) (JNP)**

6.i: WHITENECKED STORK PRB, 1 pair const., N c. 10m up Fig tree.

MYSORE DISTRICT**Kabini resort (MRC)**

10-11.i: GREY HEADED FISHING EAGLE; OSPREY ; BROWN FISH OWL.

KERALA**TRIVANDRUM DISTRICT****Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary vi.2001 (AKS, CH, SK, SC)**

TIGER BITTERN CB, nestlings seen.

THRISSUR DISTRICT**Kole Wetlands 12.viii (SKB)**

WHITE IBIS 22; SPOTBILL DUCK 10; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 2; GREENSHANK 3.

KOTTAYAM DISTRICT**Kodimatha Marshes (SB, K, A, SV)**

11.viii: WOOD SANDPIPER 1.

TAMIL NADU

Kodaikanal, Bombay Shola and nearby (BW)

28.iv: BLACK AND ORANGE FLYCATCHER NT, 1; INDIAN EDIBLE-NEST SWIFTLET 20.
29.vi: WHITE-BELLIED SHORTWING VU, 1.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: AK Shivakumar (AKS); Anand Chiplankar (AC); Anil Bhola (AB); Aparna Chiplankar (ApC); Aswin (A); Beulah Wood (BW); Bill Harvey (BH); C Harikumar (CH); Clement Francis (CF); Dipu Karuthedathu (DK); Geeta Sabarwal (GS); Heinz Lainer (HL); J Harsha (JH); JN Prasad (JNP); Joby Joseph (JJ); Karthik (K); Kanwar B Singh (KBS); M Sunil Kumar (MSK); MR Chaitra (MRC); N Shiva Kumar (NSK); Nikhil Devasar (ND); Pia Sethi (PS); Saju Vasan (SV); Sreekumar B (SB); Sreenivasan KB (SKB); Suneesh Kumar (SK); Suramya Mudgal (SM); Suresh C Sharma (SCS); Susanthkumar C (SC); Ulhas Rane (UR).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST

"I received the latest *Pitta* and enjoyed going through it. Thanks for writing about Rishi Valley Bird Preserve.

"I wish to comment on the "Birding Notes" pertaining to **Kerala** on page 7. I find the **Chestnutbellied Nuthatch** reported from five sites, all south of Palghat Gap. This species is restricted to the Nilgiri region in southern India, chiefly seen in Bandipur / Mudumalai / Wynaad region. Even the latest field guides have not reported the species outside this region.

"The sighting of **Nilgiri Laughing Thrush**, endemic to the Nilgiris, in Munnar and Nelliampathy Hills, is again quite unlikely. The record of **Skimmer** in Thenmala is unusual and the species, if I am not mistaken, is not on the Kerala list. The record of **Red Munia** and **Large Green Barbet** in Thekkady as well as that of the **Orangebreasted Green Pigeon** in Nelliampathy Hills and **Malabar Whistling Thrush** at Kumarakom need to be published with more details as they are not common / reported earlier in the sites and more information on them would be welcome.

"I have the following comments on Mr. Siraj A. Taher's write up about **Blackcrested Baza** in the March 2001 issue of *Pitta*: He mentions that 'in south India, there are a few historical records from Tamil Nadu...' I wish to point out that the Baza has been seen regularly in winter in Chennai (Madras) city since mid 1970s, in small numbers. It has been recorded in the Guindy National Park, Theosophical Society estates and a small mango grove at Manali. Kannan (1986 *JBNHS* 82: 654-655) reported on his sighting in Madras. Sugathan (1982 *JBNHS* 79: 567-575), writing about the avifauna of Point Calimere, reports of a bird trapped and ringed there on 24th October 1981.

"I am glad that you will be now following only Ripley's nomenclature. I think Edward Dickinson's note makes a lot of sense. I shall send my birding notes shortly." —V. Santharam, Rishi Valley, Chittoor District, A.P.

[Editorial Comment: We published the above records despite being alerted by P.O. Nameer, our referee from Kerala, for a reason. We took a stand that the veracity of such observations depended a lot on the birding ability of the observer. Rajeev Mathew informed us that he had seen these species on several earlier occasions and was reporting them only after confirming their identities. Birds are vagile and birders are known to tread different paths in their wanderings. We suggest that birders in these areas be alert to such species and report their presence or absence in subsequent issues of *Pitta*.]

"I am glad to receive the letter, membership card, and the *Pitta* (122-123), Bulletin of the B.S.A.P. The contents of *Pitta* are excellent.

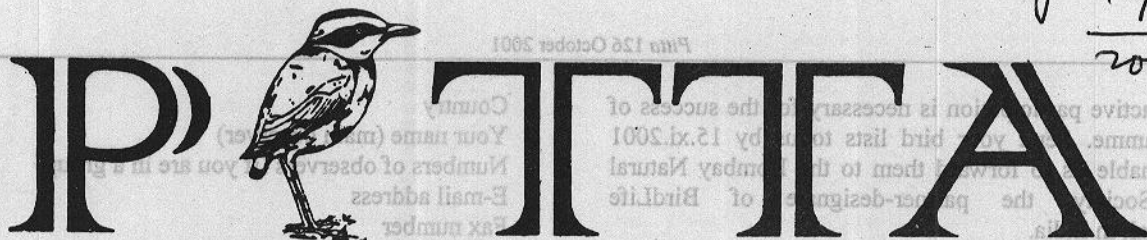
"I apologize for writing, but one thing is there, that slightly dissatisfied me. As far as I know, the northeast region of India is considered as a Hotspot for its biodiversity, including avi-fauna. Due to the fact that N.E. India is a meeting place of two zoo-geographic sub regions—the Indian and Indo-Chinese, within the frame work of Indomalayan zoogeographic region, the N.E. states including our Assam has rich diversity in bird species. There are two Endemic Bird Areas also (1) Eastern Himalayas and (2) Assam Plain (Collar *et al.* 1994 & Sattersfield *et al.* 1998). But you have ignored this region in your compilement of *Birding Notes*. I solicit your kind deliberation on this matter." —Golap Gogoi, Golaghat, Assam. <golap_gogoi@yahoo.co.in>

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A. Taher (6612608) **E-mail:** aasheesh@vsnl.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000 Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 126: October 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed Papers 10.x.2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21-x-2001: Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak District: Meet at 7am. Carry water and snacks. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 15-x-2001, 6 p.m.: Annual General Meeting. Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

EDITORIAL & NOTES & NEWS

EDITORIAL

Pressure of other work kept us from working on this issue of *Pitta* to bring it out in time with a full complement of the usual 8 pages that members are used to. We have however decided to go ahead with this single page issue as there are pressing matters to be communicated to members and time permits just so much work. We promise a full-bodied issue in November.

We request members to keep sending their birding notes and other information regularly. Notes received for this issue will be published in the November issue of *Pitta*.

Mayura vol. 14, 1997 (Published on 30.viii.2001), was couriered / posted to members in September. We have received information from some that copies did not reach them. If this is the case with any of you, please write back and we'll try and send you another copy.

The mix-up of date and day for the AGM, in the September issue of *Pitta* is regretted. It had to be rectified by mailing post-cards to all members.

We have launched our own website, <http://www.bsaponline.org> and hope to contribute to the information overload on the amorphous world of the Internet. It is still under construction as we go to print, but by the time you receive this issue of *Pitta*, we would have gone online! Constructive criticism is always welcome! Appreciation never fails to cheer! Congratulations to members, M.K. Prasad and Humayun Taher for doing a great job!

BSAP ANNUAL CAMP

HORSLEY HILLS: 1.xi.2001-4.xi.2001

It is proposed to hold a 3-day birdwatching camp at Horsley Hills, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. Participants will leave Hyderabad in the evening on 1.xi.2001 and start back from Madanapalle in the evening on 4.xi.2001. The journey will be made by an overnight bus of the APSTRC. The approximate cost of the trip will be Rs.1300/-. Depending upon the availability and type of accommodation and the number of participants this will get reduced. The last date of booking is 15.x.2001. Those willing to participate should book their place in advance and pay Rs.1300/- on 15.x.2001 at the AGM of the Society to enable us to make

arrangements. An amount of Rs.200/- will be retained for cancellations, the last day for which is 20.x.2001.

For booking a place and further details about the camp please contact Shafaat Ulla at 3353098 / 3234153.

7TH WORLD BIRD COUNT: 1-31 October 2001

The World Bird Count (WBC) is the largest bird race in the world. Every October, we invite birders in the world to send us their birding reports. Last year, we received reports from 86 countries and regions and the total number of observed species in the world was 5273!

To help conservation projects for birds in Asia, NTT-ME donates 1,000 Japanese Yen (approx. US\$9) to BirdLife International for each species that is reported in the World Bird Count, to BirdLife's Threatened Species Fund, up to a maximum of 5 million Yen. Since the 1st World Bird Count in 1995, the donation granted to the BirdLife International has been used to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats in Asia. Especially, BirdLife International published the *Threatened Birds of Asia*, supported by the donation from WBC, in June 2000.

The donation from the 7th WBC will be used to save threatened birds listed in this publication.

Wild Bird Society of Japan (BirdLife in Japan), with the sponsorship of NTT-ME (Nippon Telephone and Telegraph Corporation - Multimedia Engineering) is holding the 7th NTT-ME World Bird Count from 1-31 October this year.

The theme of the 7th World Bird Count is "Birdwatching Together". It is not necessary to travel far away to watch birds. You can discover little surprises every day by watching common birds in your neighborhood. Besides, birdwatching is not only fun but it also provides opportunities for families and friends to share moments and facilitates their conversations. World Bird Count is an opportunity for people to get together and enjoy watching and talking on birds and nature. Birds are often the most visible form of biodiversity to many people, regardless of whether they live in the countryside or in a city. In this sense, birds are our neighbours and should be part of everyday life. If bird numbers are falling, then it is an indication of decline in the quality of our environment and birds, like us, can survive in the long run only in healthy surroundings.

Your active participation is necessary for the success of this programme. Send your bird lists to us by 15.xi.2001 latest to enable us to forward them to the Bombay Natural History Society, the partner-designate of BirdLife International, in India.

4. Country
5. Your name (main observer)
6. Numbers of observers (if you are in a group)
7. E-mail address
8. Fax number
9. Comments about your birdwatching trip

The information you should include is:

1. List of bird species seen or heard between 1-31.x.01.
2. Date of birdwatching trip
3. Location of birdwatching

Enjoy yourself and also help birds!

PIGEON POST

"This is in response to V. Santharam's letter in 'Pigeon Post' *Pitta* #125 September 2001, regarding my birding notes from Kerala, published in *Pitta* #124 August 2001, p. 7.

"My first sighting of the Nilgiri Laughingthrush from Munnar (Rajamala Sanctuary) was in 1998, which when I discussed with some birders here and referring books seemed way out of range. The next year, 1999, I saw these birds again in Rajamala. I sent a note for publication in *Pitta*, but P.O. Nameer, the regional referee, shot it down. Again in 2000 and now in 2001 I have seen them and, this time also in Marayoor. These birds were very partial to Tea bushes and literally melted into them. Nellyampathy was a new experience altogether. And I was not surprised to see these birds there, after having seen them in Munnar. Here I also saw the Wynaad Laughingthrush.

"The Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch also I reported for the first time in 1998, from our garden in Munnar (Karadi Para, 12km from Munnar on the Munnar-Cochin highway). At Idukki, they were in a mixed hunting party and so also in Thekkady.

"The Skimmers in Thenmala I am sure is a bird not seen usually. What brought them there I don't know. All I know is that I saw them—all eight of them.

"The Red Munias are there; we saw them as we did Black-headed Munias. These birds were close to the quarters where there is a glen of some ten acres.

"The large Green Barbet was seen by all of us. We were very particular of a sight ID because the calls of the Small Green Barbet are similar to its larger cousin.

"The Orange-breasted Green Pigeons are to be found in the fruit tree areas. They had swarmed a ficus tree.

"The Malabar Whistling-thrush has been seen by me, since 1994, at Kumarakom. This time, after seeing and hearing them for eight years, I thought that I could report the matter with confidence.

"In the latest field-guides to the birds of our region—there are gaps and holes that have to be filled. I could cite several examples where bird distribution does not coincide with the actual distribution on the ground. I leave the matter there."

—Rajeev Mathew, Hyderabad.

"There are two definite migrations of the White-cheeked Tern off the Goa coast: a short and not completely regular northward spring movement in March and the first half of April and a prolonged, regular southward movement from the second half of August to the first week of October. The spring migration, of only a few thousand individuals, presumably takes the birds along the West coast of India to their breeding grounds in the Arabian Gulf, the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula and the southern part of the Red Sea. Humayun Abdulali had collected circumstantial evidence that these terns have bred on the Vengurla Rocks, a group of offshore islets ~40 km north of Goa. My 12 visits to the Rocks during the last 13 years (3 of them during the SW-monsoon breeding season) showed that the birds do not breed there anymore. I know of no other breeding colonies on the Indian subcontinent though there might be some off the Makran coast (Pakistan).

"The autumn migration, of a yearly varying projected minimum number of 10-20000 individuals presumably takes the terns to their still unknown winter quarters, probably in the southern Indian Ocean." —Heinz Lainer, Goa.

[Editorial comment: This was in reply to our query whether among White-cheeked Terns there is a northward migration in March-April and then a southward migration in August. If so, where do they breed?]

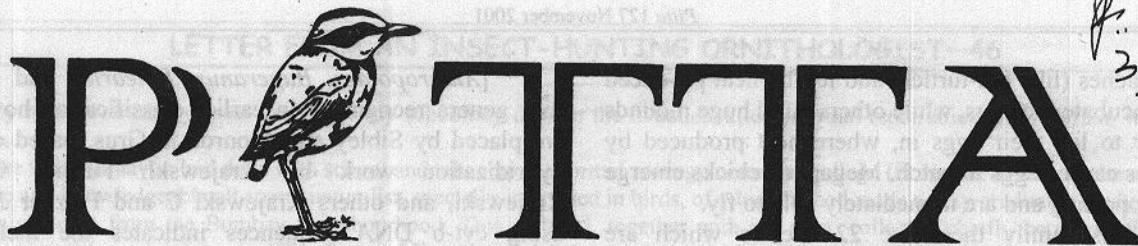
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Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 127: November 2001

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11-xi-2001: Shamirpet Lake, Rangareddi District: Meet at 7am at the Shamirpet tourist complex lounge. This is a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 19-xi-2001, 6 p.m.: Film show. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Indexed Paprefs 10.XI.2001

'Extinct' flycatcher rediscovered in Indonesia

Barcelona, Spain, 6th October 2001: BirdLife International today announced the rediscovery of the Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici*, a species of bird endemic to the small island of Damar, north east of Timor, in southern Maluku Province, Indonesia.

At the launch of the first World Bird Festival Dr Nigel Collar, BirdLife International's Senior Research Fellow at Cambridge University said: 'The Festival is a global celebration of birds and today we have even more reason to celebrate because we can announce the rediscovery of the Damar Flycatcher a species that has not been seen since the 19th century. The bird was recently found by a BirdLife Indonesia Programme survey of Damar Island.' He continued: 'This is a real boost to BirdLife's Asian Threatened Species fund which was launched in June 2001 in Tokyo by HIH Princess Takamado.'

The species was rediscovered in September 2001 during a survey of Damar Island conducted for the BirdLife Indonesia Programme by Colin Trainor.

The survey reports that the species occurs in relatively high density at the sites visited, indicating that it may be relatively abundant on the island (see map).

This striking forest dwelling bird is blue all over with a white eyebrow and tiny white breast-flecking.

[International website at www.birdlife.net. For further information please contact Michael Szabo on +44 07779 018 332 (mobile) in Barcelona.]

Rediscovery of Bruijn's Brush-turkey on Waigeo Island, Sorong, Irian-Jaya, Indonesia

On March 1999, the Waigeo Expedition 1999 was organised, first, to carry out an intensive search to rediscover the 'long lost' *Aepyodius bruijnii*, and, second, to do a bird inventory in general. It was followed by the second Waigeo Expedition in 2000.

Almost all Waigeo villages were surveyed and several treks into the nearly inaccessible, rugged and densely forested interior of the island (total surface about 3,200 sq.km) were done. We provided local people with illustrations of the Bruijn's Brush-turkey and urged them to

report any sights to Kris Tindige, the chairman of the Papua Bird Club, the Indonesia counterpart in Sorong, and the nearest contact.

Yenbekaki, a village unvisited by the previous expeditions, was one of our best targets for exploration. We made field trips into its forest interior with local people who mainly depend on the forest for a livelihood, including hunting, bird trapping and doing selective logging to produce planks, etc, which they sell at Sorong. The people were very helpful and supplied us with useful information. After the trip, we left the villagers more clear illustrations of the bird and tried to motivate them to report any findings.

This finally brought an excellent result. On 14th December 2000, a pighunter from Yenbekaki brought the head and bones of a 'Mangwap' (the local name for the Bruijn's Brush-turkey) as remains of their meal to Kris Tindige, who immediately preserved the materials in alcohol. These remains were carefully studied and compared to other Megapodes, using photos, measurements and illustrations from literature by Heij, Post and Tindige. Heij and Post, the Dutch members of the Waigeo Expeditions, studied mounted specimens of Bruijn's Brush-turkey and other closely related Megapode-species in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (New York) and Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense (Java-Indonesia).

The Waigeo Expedition 2001 was mounted by Kees Heij and Hans Post, to research, together with Kris Tindige, the remains of the bird in Sorong. After this the place where the bird was caught was visited to collect more information.

Dogs had trapped the bird near a small stream between hills that were used by nickel mining some 25 years earlier. Because of its heavy weight and injuries, the bird was not able to fly. Instead, it fell down and was not able to move, and as a result one of its legs was injured by the dog. To reach the location, we walked some few hours, following the hunting trails and throughout the Werar River (located between Yenbekaki and Puper). The stream rises approximately to 100m in elevation.

The Megapodes Megapodiidae are the only family of birds which exhibit peculiar and unique breeding habits: they use external heat sources (instead of body heat) to incubate their eggs. Some species bury their eggs in the sand of sun-

drenched beaches (like sea-turtles) and let the heat produced by the sun incubate the eggs, while others build huge mounds of leaf litter to lay their eggs in, where heat produced by rotting leaves causes eggs to hatch. Megapode chicks emerge fully self-supporting and are immediately able to fly.

Within this family there are 22 species which are distributed over Australia, Papua New Guinea, East-Indonesia, the Philippines, the Nicobar Islands and some islands in the Southwest-Pacific (Tonga, the Marianas, Palau). Most species occur in the Indo-Australian region where they inhabit tropical (mountain) forests. The highest diversity of the species is found in New Guinea and Australia (Jones et al. 1995).

One of New Guinea's species is Bruijn's Brush-turkey, *Aepyodius bruijnii*, endemic to Waigeo Island off Northwest New Guinea (Irian Jaya) Indonesia. Bruijn's Brush-turkey is the only megapode which has never been observed alive by western scientists, despite the effort of about 15 expeditions in search of this 'lost species'. The bird is only known from 23 specimens (all collected on Waigeo) kept in the collections of natural history museums in the United States and Europe. Towards the end of the 20th century the specimen-count was 15 (Jones et al. 1995), but six additional specimens were recently discovered in the Museum Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (Voisin et al. 2000), one in The Natural History Museum, Tring (Dekker 2000) and in November 1999 the Dutch team of the Waigeo Expedition (Heij & Post) found seven, instead of the six specimens listed in Jones et al. (1995), in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, New York. All but one or two of these birds were collected around 1880 by hunters employed by the Dutch plumassier A.A. Bruijn on the island of Waigeo. The last 'sign of life' of the species dates back to 1938 when Jusup Khakiaj (Dillon Ripley's field-assistant) obtained a single bird on Waigeo for the collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia (Meyer de Schauensee 1940; Ripley 1942).

Although we did not actually see the bird in the wild, we did establish the ongoing existence of Bruijn's Brush-turkey on Waigeo. Any doubt about the occurrence of the species on Waigeo belongs to the past. Future expeditions should focus on finding Bruijn's brush-turkeys in their breeding habitat and get any information about its behaviour, ecology, distribution, population size and threats. [Kris Tindige, Papua Bird Club, Wildlife Watch, P.O. Box 182, Sorong, Papua (Irian Jaya), Indonesia. Tel/Fax: ++ 62-951-327196. E-mail: papubirdclub@hotmail.com. Downloaded from <http://www.surfbirds.com>]

Every years thousands of Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides (Grus) virgo** visit India for wintering. Kheechan near Phalaudi (a small town between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, in Rajasthan) attracts a large population of these birds. This year a first batch of 72 Demoiselle cranes arrived on 28th August, a little earlier than last year. As per reports more than 15,000 cranes arrive in this locality where they are given grains by local community. This place alone supports a large population of Demoiselle cranes which is much larger than what was reported from all other sites combined for Rajasthan (See table 2).

* [*Anthropoides*, *Buggeranus*, *Balearica* and *Grus* are four genera recognised in earlier classification however all are placed by Sibley and Monroe in *Grus*, based on DNA-hybridization work by Krajewski. Further work by Krajewski, and others Krajewski C and Fetzner JW, 1994 using cyt-b DNA sequences indicates the inclusion of *Anthropoides* into *Grus* is premature. These relationships require further resolution.]

Table 1: Approximate number of Demoiselle cranes that have wintered at Kheechan, Phalaudi

Year -- Approximate population

1990-91—1,800-2,000; 1991-92—2,700; 1992-93—5,000; 1993-94—6,000; 1994-95—5,000-6,000; 1995-96—6,500-8,000; 1996-97—7,000-10,000; 1997-98—8,000-11,000; 1998-99—9,000-12,000; 1999-00—10,000-15,000; 2000-01—15,000; 2001-02—72, till 28th August 2001.

Estimate of Total World population is 200,000-240,000. Estimate of Eastern Asian population is 70-100,000. Thus Demoiselle crane is* second most abundant Crane of the World.

Table 2: Demoiselle crane in Rajasthan (Source: Midwinter waterfowl count reports)

Year-Number [Sites covered] (Number of volunteers)

1987- 0 [6] (NMS); 1988 -94 [8] (NM); 1989-195 [29] (25 includes BNHS hydrbiological project team); 1990-164 [36] (NMS); 1991 -NA [NA] (NA); 1992 -186 [17] (11); 1993 -6 [35] (13); 1994- 4104 [28] (*20); 1995-0 [18? or 19] (*20); 1996-0 [10] (*20); 1997- NA; 1998- NA; 1999- NA; 2000- NA; 2001-NA.

(1200-1400 birds reported from Udaipur dated 22 March 1986).

In 1994, 25 and in 1995, 68 Unidentified cranes were reported.

NMS= Not mentioned statewide.

NM=Not mentioned in the report.

NA=Not available (with me). I shall be obliged if some one can spare me a copy or provide photostat copy (if the same is allowed).

(*XX)= Report gives a consolidated list of participants for years 1994 to 1996.

Table 3: Conservation Status of Demoiselle crane

IUCN: Lower Risk (least concern)

CITES: Appendix II

BI: VU C1 (BirdLife International)

WPA 1972: Included in Schedule 3 at entry no.16 as Cranes (Gruidae)

[Dhirendra Devarshi, Bharatpur-Jaipur, Downloaded from nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—46

"One of my most promising *chelas* from his early schoolboy days in the twenties, after my final repatriation from Burma, was my cousin Humayun..."

"By the time Humayun had done with school and taken up the formal zoology course at college (St Xavier's) he had already become an enthusiastic and knowledgeable all-round naturalist, specially interested in birds, of which he had made a very creditable study collection for his college museum from the Bombay neighbourhood. This material, together with my own, collected chiefly between 1924 and 1929, formed the basis of our joint paper, 'The Birds of Bombay and Salsette', published in the *Journal* of the BNHS in 1936-7. In the early thirties Humayun spent three long college vacations with me on the Hyderabad and Travancore bird surveys. There he got his first practical introduction to methodical specimen collecting and fieldwork, which he has since developed to such good purpose. As an enthusiastic and perceptive young naturalist with keen observation and an original, inquiring mind, he proved a most useful field assistant: a pleasant, stimulating and amusing companion in camp and on shooting trips, being a tireless and discriminating collector of bird and other natural history specimens. Humayun was an excellent shot with his 12-bore and usually kept the camp in meat. Moreover, he was somewhat of a dare-devil, such as scaling up a towering scarp to an eagle's eyrie, or dangling at the end of an uncertain rope a hundred feet up within a cave-shaft to examine swiftlets' nests.

"While Honorary Secretary of the Society (1950-62) and its representative on the Bombay State Wildlife Advisory Board, Humayun was actively involved, in collaboration with the Forest Department, in drafting the Bombay Wild Birds and Wild Animals Protection Act of 1951. It was the fruit of critical painstaking study and distillation and adaptation of similar legislation in a number of advanced western countries, and, with slight modifications, it later served as the model for the Central Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972—acclaimed as the most perfect piece of wildlife legislation we have so far had in India. It was mainly through Humayun's initiative and efforts as Honorary Secretary that the Society's negotiations with the Central Government for a separate building for the permanent housing of its offices, library and invaluable zoological collections were successfully completed—as witness whereof stands Hornbill House today..."

[Sálim Ali, 1987, "The Fall of a Sparrow", pp. 192-193]

"Between the two world wars wildlife had diminished to some extent in British India, but the several hundred Native States extended over almost half the country and many of the rulers protected birds and animals to afford more sport for themselves and their valued guests.

"With Independence, this protection disappeared overnight, and the freer issue of arms licenses—many under the pretext of crop-protection—the rapid building of roads into all parts of the country, together with the almost complete disappearance of all ethics of shikar, like not shooting at night and from jeeps and motorcars, and out of season, led to a rapid and alarming fall in the quantity of all wildlife all over the country.

"Wildlife has now been taken over by the new Department of Environment and it is hoped that the few small changes to the Act needed to remove the long meaningless schedules will be effected, and the whole effort based on the acceptance of the principle that wildlife is ordinarily not to be commercialised. Put a price on its head and the crow will soon be extinct."

[Humayun Abdulali, 1984, "The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Inconsistencies", *Blitz special* 1(2): 49]

News of Abdulali *saab's* death came via an e-mail sent by his son Akbar on 3rd June saying, "You've probably heard, but father passed away quite peacefully last night." Then came another e-mail from the unfailing Aasheesh Pittie the next day announcing this sad, but inevitable event at his ripe old age (HA's), imploring me to write about Abdulali on the Net—"You were one of the privileged few to have spent some time with him during his last days on earth. Why don't you write something about that meeting and about the man and his immense contribution to Indian ornithology, for the Internet based mailing lists? I am sure that not one, repeat not one, of those that subscribe to these lists know what the loss means for all of us. Not that they realized its presence when he was alive. If nothing else, would you consider writing about the man and your experience with him in a future Letter for Pitta?"

This is a solemn responsibility, but a pleasurable duty that must be performed by me who benefited immensely in advancing my knowledge of bird taxonomy through correspondence, publications and, lately, the brief personal discussions emanating from this wonderful human being, honest to the core, direct and shooting straight from the heart but gifted with an acute, thinking and analytical mind plus a great sense of humour and perception. I will certainly miss him personally because I know what I will never have any more—his warmth, criticisms, advice and his fund of long expertise on the "subspecies" of our sub-continent's birds.

That Humayun *saab* was a man of rare quality and hard labour cannot be questioned. He was reserved and kept to himself largely because he could not "suffer fools gladly" and this adjective, in his tone of regret, was used many times by him during our talks when some names came up in our discussions. I was lucky to have spent five invaluable days and nights at his flat in Bandra (west) located near the famous Hindostani film actor Dilip Kumar's house. I made a list of his bird library and took notes from many of his annotated (often specially interleaved) books and journals, photocopied several hundred pages of old, old literature I had no access to so far, helped him with some points on a few chapters of his "Memoirs" he was completing (his younger son, Salman, and Dr Rachel Reuben have undertaken to complete these), shared some time with select correspondence he allowed me to read and comment on, besides exchanging words and actions on a variety of subjects, both scientific and personal. This long delayed invitation of his, first some four years ago to talk about my project proposal to sample the insect fauna of the Borivli jungle, but this year to speak about the tragedy of Indian bird taxonomy and the unfinished tasks he wished me to help complete by spending a few days at his home was, I believe, providential and I must therefore make a few things known about Humayun *saab's* work and what he wanted to be done after him, to complete what he had started. Putting his name on bird rooms, sanctuaries, conservation centres, bird trails, groves, funds, etc., etc., would be to destroy his own preferences, with our traditional and meaningless habitual behaviour. Better than deifying him in stone or jungle, in buildings or in print, and having the usual anniversary functions to remember his birth or death, we might satisfy his soul if we attempt to complete what he had begun and followed in his well-directed footsteps, which were as sure as a mountain goat's.

His last wishes were few but important. First, he wanted his Catalogue of the BNHS bird collection completed by competent bird taxonomists (with scholarly and taxonomically relevant annotations, like he had included in the first 33 parts) and asked me to help Saraswathy Unnithan whom he had trained and I told him I would be pleased to do this if the BNHS requested me to do so. All the measurements of the remaining taxa to be published on he said he had done, as well as made notes on most of the remaining Passeridae, Fringillidae and Emberizidae—Bayas, Munias, Finches and Buntings. I would personally prefer to retain the senior authorship of late Humayun Abdulali, even if posthumously, to acknowledge his monumental work.

Second, he told me that the BNHS was the greatest love of his life but that now he had little to do like in the past. He regretted that the increasing publicity drives and so-called nature education trips were leading to the lack of funds and attention to desperately needed research on all groups (known or still unknown) of our animal and plant life. The journal, he also felt, could do with more varied content, especially the non-technical ones which had graced the earlier volumes before our independence and made them great reading, even for amateurs. The library needed more money (for important foreign journals and books, if not available by exchange with the BNHS' journal and books) and care, with listing and updates of its holdings, which should be published, as before, when new books were acquired.

But, his most cherished wish he told me was to make the BNHS bird collection complete through gifts or exchanges of unrepresented Indian sub-continent and adjacent areas' taxa from other world museums with our region's bird skins and eggs. This is a matter that foreign museums and institutions, with Indian sub-continent bird material, must think seriously about now, and try to honour, so the much needed taxonomic studies on still poorly known species' limits and the "value" of so many "sub-species" can be carried out here by systematic ornithologists in collaboration with curators and specialists in India and abroad where our collections are housed in museums. Humayun also wished that the BNHS authorities sought permission from the Ministry of Environment and Forests to be permitted to collect fresh specimens from still poorly explored areas and fill up gaps in the BNHS Bird Room and in its trays and drawers. The Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta could contribute its mite in this direction, plus offer collaborative survey studies, in Abdulali saab's remembrance, especially as he had helped this national institution and some of its bird specialists with systematic ornithology research.

Humayun's last major wish pertained to the superb protected area of jungle and brook named after Borivli, a Bombay suburb which he had resolutely fought for, to offer its biodiversity the human non-interference they deserved to carry on with their own lives and loves—these rooted green wonders that give us the air we breathe and the zoological evolutionary kaleidoscope, from the tiny six-legged creatures and also small animals 'lower' than their rank (more primitive, older) to the supple, spotted canine predator which prowls the concrete jungle outskirts at night for its abundant pariah dogs, a great delicacy to its rough tongue. This superb still largely pristine area, protected since 1969, and some 100 sq. km in area, attracts 3-4 million visitors every year to its recreational area and thus is the most visited tourist destination among any other protected wildlife area anywhere in India, by far. Though much is known about its avifauna and its flora, data about its other animal denizens, except the larger mammals and reptiles, is still woefully incomplete. This is in spite of what is certainly the most important and ancient natural history society in south Asia, the BNHS, being its neighbour and having an almost 118-year history of floral and faunal explorations in our sub-continent and beyond.

Obituary messages about Humayun Abdulali appeared in the nathistory-india and birdsofbombay mailing lists on the Internet. I had also read earlier an obituary 'Letter to the Editor' of The Hindu newspaper of 9th June by Bittu Sahgal, an 'Indiafile' column item in the Times of India (10th June), J.C. Daniel's circular correspondence to Bombay Natural History Society members dated 9th June, Zafar Futehally's curiously brief Editorial note in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers of May-June 2001, obituary pieces by Siraj Taher, Sunjoy Monga and Aasheesh Pittie in the Pitta of June-July 2001, Daniel Wesley's "Pigeon Post" (my own nomenclatural idea!) letter in the August 2001 Pitta issue, and Sunjoy Monga's 2-page "Obituary" in Sanctuary Asia of August 2001. However, there are some errors and omissions in the obituary notices in Pitta # 122-123 (June-July 2001), which I must point out. Siraj Taher wrote that Humayun Abdulali "was born on 14th June 1914", but Humayun's completed Bird watchers' Questionnaire, which he had returned to me in September 1991, gives his date and place of birth as "Kobe, Japan. 19th May 1914", and also states that he started bird watching in "c. 1930", and that he was an "Amateur" bird watcher who made some "40/50" birding outings each year and that his other hobby/interest was "small game shooting". Aasheesh Pittie is not quite correct about Humayun's "last paper" which actually was his obituary note on Salim Ali in the Blackbuck (12: 90-92) in 1997; but Humayun's final written publication was his Foreword to Sunjoy Monga's book on Borivli—"City Forest: Mumbai's National Park" released in the year 2000. Aasheesh's figures about Humayun's total papers published are also faulty. Humayun's younger son, Salman, just e-mailed me an attachment giving his completed "Bibliography of Humayun Abdulali", and from this it appears that his father authored a total of 346 (not 267!) titles, of which 214 were on birds, 48 on other wildlife, 60 were book reviews, 5 obituaries, 14 annual reports, and 5 popular articles. Pittie, however, is almost exactly factual about Humayun Abdulali's new taxa, except that he omitted one more subspecies he had named—*Macropygia rufipennis tiwarii* Abdulali, 1979, and that the correct year of publication for *Oriolus xanthornus reubeni* is 1977 (not 1976). Also, *Accipiter virgatus abdulalii* Mees was published in 1981 (not 1980).

Again, may I implore people not to continue this "hero-worshipping" syndrome in this new millenium, but try to carry out Abdulali saab's pet wishes and complete what he started, and raise natural history studies, research and conservation to new heights so we jointly protect and restore at least 10% of our land's original ecosystems. In further parts I will write more about Humayun Abdulali's work, his unfinished Catalogue, and related matters, and also some interesting and important tit-bits about a great amateur bird watcher we have lost without realizing his value in this life. I pay my personal condolences to his sons Akbar and Salman and my heartfelt sympathies to his wife, Rafia, who must feel this great loss of a lifetime companion who will share her space and thought no more. *Alwidaa*, Abdulali saab.

[NOTE: My Letter # 45 in September's Pitta has unfortunately been printed with numerous errors and omissions owing to my haste and careless editing. An insert in a future Pitta issue will carry the correct draft for my Letter # 45—K.G.]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

SPOTLIGHT: Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* By Siraj A. Taher

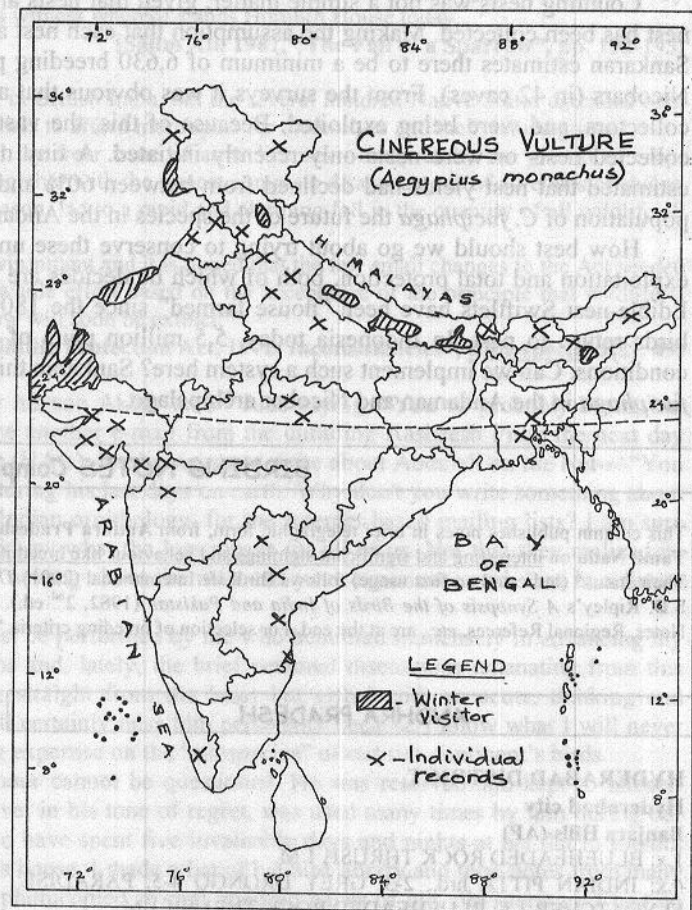
This column focuses on birds that are listed in BirdLife International's Red Data Book. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

Old World' vultures generally comprise of big birds with very large wingspans, sometimes almost up to 3m long. Regarded as modified eagles that have adapted to a diet of carcasses and offal, rather than hunt live prey, they constitute the sub-family 'Aegypinae'. Most of these have dark plumages of varying shades of which the Cinereous (or Black) Vulture *Aegypius monachus* is the darkest with it's over all plumage a dark chocolate brown. It has a naked pinkish-grey neck with no fleshy wattles and a partially naked head it has a tuft of dark feathers around the crop. The bill is blackish-brown and legs and feet are grey-cream. Largest of the Old World vultures, having a huge wingspan of almost 2m, broad wings and a very dark colour, it is almost unmistakable. In overhead flight, its dark upper and lower plumage, a wedge-shaped tail (contra, rounded in the King Vulture) and, perfectly held broad wings, make identification easy. The ideal time to observe vultures would be from late mornings when the rising thermals will be strong enough to allow these huge birds to soar, sometimes for hours at a time. They can be seen gliding effortlessly without beating their wings even once, and only turning their head left and right to search for food.

The food is almost exclusively carrion and offal. Having extremely well developed senses of sight and smell, they can locate carcasses from far off distances. The Cinereous Vulture mostly join other vultures feeding at a carcass where it commands a reverence from other vultures when it boldly walks forward through the fighting birds and helps itself to an undisturbed meal departing as soon as it has finished eating. The order in which vultures are able to feed at a carcass depends considerably on the size of the bird, the size of its bill and the manner of its stride and gait. It has been recorded as a breeding resident in Baluchistan, Gilgit and Quetta in Pakistan and also in Punjab, Assam (1,000-1,500m), Sikkim and Bhutan and also along the dry temperate regions of the Himalayan ranges between 2,000-3,000m. The nest is a huge mast of sticks and twigs which are added every year to an old nest, at times measuring 2m wide and about 1m deep, usually on top of large tall trees or on cliffs and ledges. Only one large egg is laid which varies in colour from white to pale buff or cream. Nest building, incubation period and duties are unrecorded in India. The breeding period is March to April. There is an old record of eggs collected from Quetta between February and April.

There is very little information and few records of this vulture in the Indian sub-continent. As a rule they are mostly solitary birds or may go about in pairs. A rare vulture, mostly seen during winters, when the resident populations are augmented by the migratory birds. Extralimittally its range extends from southern Europe, North Africa, southwest and south-central Asia to India and China. On the Indian sub-continent it has been recorded in the Himalayan ranges from

the extreme west to the east up to Assam, Dibrugarh and Cachar. During the winters it is seen in Punjab, Sind and N.W. Provinces of Pakistan and in India in the northwest, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and up to Maharashtra. Being a bird of the open plains and semi-desert countryside, it has been sparingly recorded in suitable areas in the Gangetic Plains and parts of Bihar. There are only two confirmed records from Andhra Pradesh. A live adult bird was brought from Karimnagar in February 1987 and kept in the Bird of Prey aviary at the Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad. One juvenile / sub-adult bird was sighted near Chevella (Rangareddi district) on 12 February 2001 about 40km from Hyderabad city. There is a photographic record of this sighting.



LITERATURE REVIEW By Suhel Quader

In this column Suhel <suhelq@ufl.edu> describes recent papers on Indian birds, published in journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Sankaran, R. (2001): The status and conservation of the Edible-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia fuciphaga*) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *Biological Conservation* 97:283-294.

Many birds build their nests using saliva to help cement the material together. Unique among them are a few of the *Collocalia* swiftlets, one of which breeds in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This species, the Edible-nest Swiftlet *C. fuciphaga*, constructs its nest entirely out of the saliva it produces from a pair of specialised glands under its tongue. The nests are open cups, affixed to the wall of a cavern or rocky overhang. During the breeding season, mainly November to May in the archipelago, such caves may house up to 600 nests.

The unique nests of these birds have caused them no little harm. The nests are valued in Chinese medicine and cuisine, and it is estimated that, early in the past century, nine million nests per year were imported into China. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are on the Western limit of the range of *C. fuciphaga*, and the collection of nests here is thought to date back two or three hundred years. What impact has nest collection had on swiftlet populations here? Ravi Sankaran, of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History in Coimbatore, spent several months each in 1995, 1996, and 1997 trying to answer this question. He surveyed the islands, often enlisting the help of local nest collectors, to find nesting sites. He also asked nest collectors to estimate the change in the yield of nests since the early 1980s.

Counting nests was not a simple matter, given that nests are collected frequently, and only a mark remains from where a nest has been collected. Making the assumption that each nest and mark indicates the existence of a separate pair of swiftlets, Sankaran estimates there to be a minimum of 6,630 breeding pairs: 4,620 in the Andamans (in 349 caves) and 2,010 in the Nicobars (in 42 caves). From the surveys it was obvious that all caves with sizeable populations of swiftlets were known to collectors, and were being exploited. Because of this, the vast majority of nests counted were merely marks from recently collected nests or were nests only recently initiated. A tiny minority of nests had eggs or chicks in them. Nest collectors estimated that nest yields had declined from between 60% and 80% since the 1980s. If this reflects a decline in the overall population of *C. fuciphaga* the future of the species in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands seems grim indeed.

How best should we go about trying to conserve these unique swiftlets? Sankaran considers two strategies, sustainable exploitation and total protection, both of which he decides are unrealistic. But, he says, there may be hope yet. In Indonesia, Edible-nest Swiftlets have been "house farmed" since the 1800s. Colonies are established in artificial structures, where the birds return to nest. In Indonesia today, 5.5 million pairs of Edible-nest Swiftlets are estimated to nest in such "farmed" conditions. Can we implement such a system here? Sankaran thinks that doing so is the best hope for the survival of *Collocalia fuciphaga* in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status* (indicated on first usage) follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hyderabad city

Banjara Hills (AP)

1.x: BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1 M.

4.x: INDIAN PITTA hrd., 2-3; GREY DRONGO 4-5; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 F; BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1 M.

KRISHNA DISTRICT

Koduru Mandal

16.viii (KS): BLACK BITTERN 1.

MEDAK DISTRICT

Dundigal Airforce Academy 2.ix (AP)

LARGE CUCKOO-SHRIKE CB, 1 ad., feeding 1 orange-gaped yng., 2' long green coloured grasshopper.

ICRISAT Campus 2.ix (CTH)

BREEDING BIRDS: DABCHICK, CORMORANT, PURPLE HERON, RED-WATTLED LAPWING, WIRETAILED SWALLOW,

REDRUMPED SWALLOW, BAYA, BLACK-THROATED WEAVER.

MIGRANTS: PAINTED STORK NT, 100; GLOSSY IBIS 2; MARSH SANDPIPER 1; WOOD SANDPIPER 100; RUFF 7; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 1.

OTHERS: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE 2

Isnapur 2.x (RM, RT)

EGYPTIAN VULTURE 1 ad., 2 juv.

Manjira Barrage 2.x (RM, RT)

PAINTED STORK 2 OH; GREYHEADED FISHING EAGLE 1 mobbed by Brahminy Kites; MARSH HARRIER 2; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER.

Patancheru 2.x (RM, RT)

PALLID HARRIER 1 M.

DELHI

Delhi Canal (Harevali to Badli villages)

1.ix (SCS, SM): LITTLE GREEN HERON 1 uncommon; SARUS CRANE VU, CB, 1 on N, +2+2+1, +1 in paddies.

14.ix (BH, SCS): OPENBILL STORK 9; WHITE IBIS NT, 2; BLACK IBIS 2+2+1; SARUS CRANE CB, 1 on N in paddies; PARASIDE FLYCATCHER 1 white M without tail-streamers in trees; LARGE CROWNED LEAF-WARBER 1 on Babul tree (uncommon); COMMON ROSEFINCH 5 uncommon.

Holambi Kalan marsh

29.viii (SCS): RUDDY CRAKE 1.

Okhla

10.ix (BH): AVOCET 26; WHISKERED TERN 120; PLAIN SAND MARTIN 1,000+.

22&23.ix (ND, BH): OPENBILL STORK 20; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 1,500; BLACKWINGED STILT 500; AVOCET c. 1,000.

Yamuna (Timarpur Water Works)

1.ix (SCS, SM): CURLEW 18 in submerged grassy patch; BRONZEWINGED JACANA CB, 3 ad., + 2 juv.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai Wetland

8-12.ix (AB, B, BH, DD, JLS, KBS, ND, NSK, PS, SCS): BLACK BITTERN 1; BLACKNECKED STORK NT, CB a pair on N as in Sept., (Pitta #125); WHITE IBIS 200+; GLOSSY IBIS 200+; WATERFOWL (ANATIDAE) c. 10,000; PALLID HARRIER 1 juv; REDHEADED MERLIN 1 pair; SARUS CRANE 1.

Sultanpur National Park

8.ix (AB, B, BH, DD, JLS, KBS, ND, NSK, PS, SCS) PAINTED STORK NT, 100 (30 on N in babul grove); SARUS CRANE CB, 1 pair on N.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary

4.ix (BH): GARGANEY 600+; SARUS CRANE CB, 2 pairs, 1 on N. 12.ix (BH, SCS): MIXED HERONRY with c. 2,500 N of INDIAN SHAG, LITTLE CORMORANT, DARTER NT, GREY HERON, CATTLE EGRET, LITTLE EGRET, NIGHT HERON, WHITE IBIS; BLACKNECKED STORK 1 M.

REWARI DISTRICT

Naharh Wildlife Sanctuary

12.ix (SCS): ROSY PASTOR c. 400 on babul and eucalyptus trees.

SONIPAT DISTRICT

Delhi Canal

13.ix (SCS): WHITENECKED STORK CB 2 on N of thorny 1m sticks, 40' up a Sheesham *Dalbergia sissoo* near Barhwani village; 1 on 2nd N 20' up a babul tree, near Juan village.

18.ix (SCS, SM): WHITEBACKED VULTURE CR, 2 ad., on eucalyptus.

23.ix (SCS, SM): CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 1 ad., on eucalyptus.

Drain Number Eight

16.ix (SCS): OPENBILL STORK 8 juv; WHITE IBIS 3; BROWN CRAKE 2+1 (emitting contact-calls).

18.ix (SCS): BROWN CRAKE 2 one carrying 2 snakes; RED MUNIA PRB, 1 M in br., plm, with N-mat.

Juan village

13.ix (SCS): SARUS CRANE 2 on N + 1 in the paddies; WIRETAILED SWALLOW CB 1 N 8' up on ceiling of a tubewell varandah; SIND SPARROW 1 M, 2 F.

Kakroi village pond

11.ix REDHEADED MERLIN 1; SIND SPARROW 3+4.

Malhana village

26.viii (SCS, JSK, AB): SIND SPARROW CB, 1 pair near N 8' up a Babul. 1 M, 1 F nearby.

Mohamedabad marshes

28.viii (SCS): PAINTED STORK 8 in paddies; OPENBILL STORK 2 juveniles; WHITE IBIS 6; SARUS CRANE CB, 1 on N with 2 eggs.

2.ix (AB/SCS): SARUS CRANE CB, 1 on N with 2 eggs; RUDDY CRAKE CB, 1 juv.

9.ix (SCS): BLACKNECKED STORK 2 (1M, 1F); WHITE-EYED POCHARD NT, 20+ (earliest so far in Haryana/Delhi); SARUS CRANE CB, pair on N; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 21; SIND SPARROW 11 (4 M, rest juv & F) on *Prosopis juliflora*.

15.ix (SCS/SM): PAINTED STORK 5; WHITE IBIS 14; SARUS CRANE CB, 2 foraging in paddies (N destroyed); INDIAN MOORHEN CB, 17 inc., juv.; RUFOUS-TAILED SHRIKE *Lanius isabellinus* 1 uncommon.

18.ix (SCS/SM): BLACKNECKED STORK 2; SARUS CRANE PRB, 1 dancing +2 foraging in paddies.

20/21.ix (SCS/SM): BLACKNECKED STORK 2; WHITE IBIS 8 in paddies; SPOONBILL 12 in paddies; SARUS CRANE 1+2; LITTLE STINT 400+ in 200 sq. yd., of flooded paddies; PAINTED SNIPE CB, 1 M, 3 juv.; SIND SPARROW 8 eating seeds on grass-heads while perched on lowest branch of *Prosopis juliflora*.

23.ix (SCS/SM): PAINTED STORK 14 in ft; SARUS CRANE 5+2+2.

Yamuna (Sonipat-Baghat bridge)

17.ix (SCS): LONGLEGGED BUZZARD 1 soaring (uncommon); EGYPTIAN VULTURE 14 near a carcass; GREAT STONE PLOVER 1+1 uncommon; SMALL PRATINCOLE 630 on moist sand.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore city

Bidadi 7.viii (JH)

BAYA CB, 5 N; WHITEBELLIED MUNIA PRB, enters a completed Baya N while owners watch 'helplessly' from nearby branch. On the same evening a Whitebellied Munia was seen carrying a fresh grass blade into the N.

Bilekanahalli 25.viii (JNP)

SPOTTED DOVE PRB, const., N c. 7m up on beam in garage under hot zinc-sheet roofing.

BTM Layout 8.viii (JA)

PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD CB, N with 2 yng; SPOTTED DOVE CB, N with 2 yng.

Cooke Town

14.viii (N): SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, N under const., using dry grass, c. 3m up a cactus plant.

10, 16.viii (N): GREY TIT CB, ad., making several sorties with food.

Cox town 3.ix (JH, PFA)

BARN OWL CB, 6 yng., rescued by PFA team from apartments where residents were trying to burn down N due to noisy yng., and ad.

Cubbon Park 20.ix (JNP)

PARIAH KITE PRB with N-mat.

Cunningham road 12.ix (JNP)

PARIAH KITE PRB with N-mat.

Hebbal tank 20.v (DK)

INDIAN MOORHEN 1 preening on the island (becoming rare in Bangalore); COOT PRB, pair chasing each other; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 10; INDIAN MYNA PRB, collecting N-mat; BAYA PRB, 1 M collecting grass blade for N const.

Jakkur Tank 23.ix (JNP)

DARTER NT, 4 (2 in tree, 2 OH); OPENBILL STORK 22; MARSH HARRIER 1; PAINTED SNIPE 1 F; SNIPE 3 un-id.; COMMON SWALLOW 2; ASHY WREN-WARBLER CB, ad., with food.

Nelligudda tank 7.viii (JH)

SPOTBILLED PELICAN 8 OH.

Thatguni/Valley School 26.viii (JNP)

JUNGLE MYNA feeding on fruit of Lavender *Barsera* sp.; PLAIN WREN-WARBLER PRB, carrying grass blade but was chased away by an Ashy Wren-warbler; ASHY WREN-WARBLER CB, ad., with food & uttering alarm calls; PIED BUSHCHAT CB, F with yng (SR); PURPLE SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm.

Ulsoor 3.ii (DB)

COPPERSMITH PRB, N under const., c. 3m up a dead branch.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Nagarahole National Park 15.vi (GC)

WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH PRB, a pair const., N c. 8m up tree.

Ranganathitoo 17.vi (UHK, AM)

CORMORANT CB, ad., with juv; PURPLE HERON CB, N with yng; POND HERON PRB, const., N; LITTLE EGRET PRB, const., N; NIGHT HERON CB, 2 N with yng; PAINTED STORK CB, N with yng; WHITE IBIS CB, N with yng; BRAHMINY KITE chasing a Large Pied Wagtail; ROSERINGED PARAKEET PRB, F inside a N-hole; STORKBILLED KINGFISHER 1; GREY TIT PRB, a pair active near a N-hole and 1 seen entering hole; BAYA CB, active N; STREAKED WEAVER PRB, const., N.

KERALA**KANNUR DISTRICT**

Pattannur 30.viii (SC)

SMALL GREEN-BILLED MALKOHA CB, N with 2 white eggs.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-

include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Anil Bhola (AB); Atanu Mondal (AM); Bill Harvey (BH); Debashis Sarkar (DB); Dharendra Devarshi (DD); Dipu Karuthedathu (DK); Giridhar Cavale (GC); Harsha J (JH); J Azad (JA); JL Singh (JLS); JN Prasad (JNP); Jagjit Singh Kuku (JSK); K Suresh (KS); Kanwar B Singh (KBS); N Shiva Kumar (NSK); Naidele (N); Nikhil Devasar (ND); People for Animals (PFA); Pia Sethi (PS); Rajeev Mathew (RM); Rajshekhar Tummala (RT); S. Balachandran (B); Santhosh R (SR); Suramya Mudgal (SM); Suresh C Sharma (SCS); U Harish Kumar (UHK).

ERRATA: Pitta #125, September 2001, p. 7: Under Haryana, Sonipat District, Drain Number Eight, read LITTLE GREEN HERON instead of LITTLE BITTERN.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST

"On the high praise by Aasheesh Pittie [Newsletter for Birdwatchers 41(2): 25-27 (2001)] for *A Field Guide to the Birds of India* et al, by Krys Kazmierczak, I made special effort to purchase the book when I was in Mumbai earlier this month. It is indeed a very worthwhile book to have, perhaps the very best for our region. Of course there are some criticisms and there would be more with greater use. For instance, the Dusky Crag Martin is far too light in colouration. Pittie's displeasure at the white background especially for light grey and white birds is well taken. I have stumbled on one omission—the Brown Hill Warbler *Prinia criniger* has been left out! Going through the latest list from BNHS this warbler is now the Brown Prinia and there is the Black-throated Prinia *Prinia atrogularis* which the book calls the Hill Prinia! I wonder how many more such confusions there are among the other groups and, how many species have been left out. Be what may, I am happy having bought the book.

"A word of caution for the large numbers of young birdwatchers. While using this and other illustrated guides, please be cautious about identifications of similar species specially so when they have not been recorded previously in your area. Of course, this does not mean your identification is wrong, but be cautious in making claims."

Editors' Note: We wrote to Mr Lavkumar Khacher, pointing out that the Brown Hill Warbler is called Striated Prinia in Krys's book. He replied...

"Your p.c. of 26.ix.2001 received. Please print my letter along with your correction—I have checked the bird. Thanks. But this highlights the confusion created by this cavalier change of names and our meek acceptance of things. You did right in asking BNHS to produce our accepted list. They have started the process which is heartening. I have received a draft copy for my comments which I am working on.

"Incidentally, if any one can indeed identify the Prinias and other *Phylloscopus* warblers from the book in question I would consider the person indeed an "expert" for the many new birders who would understandably use this attractive book, I would like to sound a word of caution. Just as instant coffee is not the same as that from freshly ground coffee beans, it would need considerable care to identify these rather contentious little birds. A lot of field experience—mannerisms, calls and a combination of ecological preferences, etc., all are necessary before you make a firm identification. So be cautious." —

Lavkumar Khacher, Gujarat.

"As you know, our natural habitats are under severe pressure and many of them are in an alarming condition. The Srisailem Tiger Reserve is one among them with log of disturbance and degradation, etc. Now a big blow is going to fall on this area to its further detriment. There is a proposal to make Srisailem Temple a *Divya kshetra*, by constructing *Shakti pithas* and 50km of road inside the reserve. Herewith I am enclosing a Xerox copy of a press clipping to enable you to take necessary action. The Nallamalai hills are an important catchment area for several streams and rivulets." —**K. Mrutyumjaya Rao.**

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A. Taher (6612608) **Website:** <http://www.bsaponline.org> **E-mail:** aasheesh@vsnl.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

**Honorary Secretary's Report presented at The Annual General Meeting of the
Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh,
Held on 15-10-2001—for the year ended 31-3-2001**

Ladies and Gentlemen: Good Evening!

It gives me great pleasure to present you with a report of the happenings in our Society for the year ended 31st March 2001.

The Society's total membership stood at 299. The break up is as follows: Life Members 152 (17 new), Ordinary 120 (46 new), Student 26 (11 new) and, Corporate 1.

During the year members made field trips to the following 10 sites: Anantgiri Hills (twice); Kasu Brahmananda Reddy N.P.; Uma Maheshwaram; Shamirpet; Narsapur Reserve Forest; Palmakole Tank; Kompalli Kanchas (evening); Ravirala Tank; ICRISAT and Manjira Reservoir.

The following programmes were held at the indoor meetings of the Society:

1. Talk by Mr Humayun Taher on Sri Lankamalleshwara Wildlife Sanctuary on 17th April 2000.
2. Talk by Mr GVVSDS Prasad, Chairman, VASORD, on 19th June 2000.
3. Talk by Dr Sivaramakrishna on Tribal knowledge of bio-diversity in A.P. on 21st August 2000.
4. Film show, Life of Birds, on 18th December 2000.
5. Talk by Dr Rhys E. Green, RSPB Principal Research Biologist and Senior Research Fellow, Dept., of Zoology, University of Cambridge, UK., on Field methods for the study of nocturnal cursorial birds.
6. Film show on 19th February 2001.
7. Film show on 19th March 2001.

Besides these, members of the Society went on an Annual Camp to Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary in Kurnool district from 13-15 August 2000.

An evening of fun and food, BSAP Blast, was organized at BSAP member Sushil Kapadia's house on 24th March 2001.

In January 2001 the Society introduced T-shirts and caps that were an instant hit not just with members but with non-members too.

Eleven copies of *Pitta*, the Society's Bulletin, were produced during this period, with a combined issue being published for May-June 2000. No issue of the Society's journal, *Mayura*, was produced during the year.

Donations were received during the year from Mr K.C. Ramakrishna (Rs1000), Mr Aasheesh Pittie (Rs500) and Messers Azad Reading Room (Rs3000). I take this opportunity to thank all of them for their support.

On behalf of the Society and on my personal behalf I would like to especially thank the following for their help and encouragement in more ways than one.

1. Sachin Jaltare for his talented artwork for our publications.
2. Kumar Ghorpadé, Siraj A. Taher and, Suhel Quader for contributing columns for *Pitta*.
3. The principal, management and staff of Vidyaranya High School for providing space for our indoor meetings.
4. The Chief Wildlife Warden, A.P. Forest Department and his team for their cooperation and forthright help whenever we required it.
5. Tom Hash for arrangements at ICRISAT.

The Executive Committee would also like to thank all members for their support and participation in the activities of the Society. Thank You.

BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH
P.O. BOX 45, BANJARA HILLS, HYDERABAD 500034

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31-3-2001

LIABILITIES		Amount Rs.	ASSETS		Amount Rs.
<u>Capital Fund:</u>		1,31,531.50	<u>Cash at Bank:</u>		47,674.28
Opening Balance	1,14,531.50		HDFC Bank	3,456.28	
	0		Canara Bank	44,218.00	
Life Membership	17,000.00		<u>Fixed Assets:</u>		7.00
			Binoculars (4)	4.00	
			Slide Projector (1)	1.00	
			Telescope (1)	1.00	
			Tripod (1)	1.00	
			Cash on hand		1,804.45
			Fixed Deposit – HDFC		70,000.00
			Closing Stock (T-shirts & caps)		1,904.40
			Excess of expenditure over income		1,707.82
			Profit & Loss Account		8,433.55
		1,31,531.50			1,31,531.50

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

1. The Society is accounting its Income & Expenditure on cash basis.
2. Life Membership of Rs17,000.00, received during theyear, has been transferred to Capital Fund, as per the Society's Memorandum.
3. Fixed Assets received as donations by Society have been assigned nominal value of Re. 1.00 each taken into account.
4. An expense of Rs. 5,250.00 for printing of new brochures of the Society is being written off over a period of three years from 1998-99 to 2000-2001. The balance amount of Rs. 1,716.00 shown as closing stock of brochures in 1999-2000 was now written off.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31-3-1999

EXPENDITURE		Amount Rs.	INCOME		Amount Rs.
<u>Printing & Stationery:</u>		20,019.00	<u>Subscriptions:</u>		14,850.00
Stationery, etc.	7,431.00		Ordinary	14,200.00	
Brochures	1,716.00		Student	650.00	
Printing – Pitta	10,872.00		<u>Other Income:</u>		34,304.78
PO Box Rent	150.00		Admission Fees	1,235.00	
Postage Charges	8,541.00		Bank Interest	7,965.78	
Miscellaneous Expenses	4,916.50		Donations	4,500.00	
Caps & T-shirts	14,135.60		Sales—T-shirts	13,350.00	
Audit Fees	500.00		Sales—Caps	4,250.00	
Stipend	2,600.00		Sales—Others	415.00	
			Stickers	1,435.00	
			Bank Charges	104.00	
			Camp	1,050.00	
			Excess of expenditure over income		1,707.82
		50,862.60			50,862.60

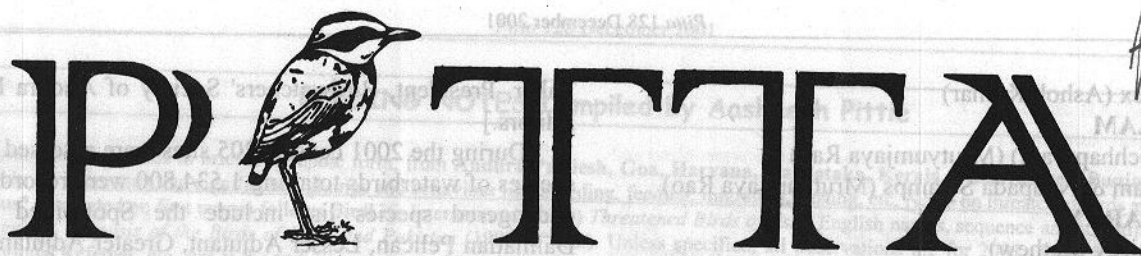
Sd/-
Siraj A. Taher
President

Sd/-
Aasheesh Pittie
Honorary Secretary

Sd/-
Sushil D. Kapadia
Honorary Treasurer

For Sunil & Sanjay
Chartered Accountants

Sunil Kumar Jain, Partner



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 128: December 2001

PROGRAMME

Indexed Papers 10.XI.2001

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 23-xii-2001: Rourial Tank, Rangareddi District: Route: Charminar-Barkas-Pahadi Shareef. After 12-13km, take the first left turn after Pahadi Shareef and drive on for 5km for the tank which is on the right side of the road. Some cars will start from Panjagutta (old Shanbhag) at 6.30am. Members proceeding directly are requested to reach the venue by 7.15-7.30am. This is a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 17-xii-2001, 6 p.m.: Film show. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

INLAND WETLANDS OF INDIA

A SACON-BSAP PROJECT

A one-day workshop was held on 25.xi.2001 in Hyderabad, to familiarize participants of the Salim Ali Center for Ornithology and Natural History's (SACON) Inland Wetlands of India project (see Pitta # 124, August 2001, p. 2). Participation was by invitation, due to budgetary constraints. Dr Lalitha Vijayan and Dr S. Narendra Prasad made presentations on scope and methodology in the first session. In the second session, participants decided on a list of 42 wetlands and wetland complexes in Andhra Pradesh, that they would survey under this project. A manual of Background Material was prepared by BSAP (with inputs from Care Earth and SACON), and sent to all participants before the workshop. The project entails a census of birds-3 separate outings (morning, evening, next morning), documentation of plants, collection of fish and socio-economic data. All this should be possible in 3 days. Actual expenses will be met by BSAP. Volunteers should contact Aasheesh Pittie (6501535) or Siraj Taher (6612608), indicating their choice of wetland and for further details. Below is the list of wetlands with names (provisional) of main volunteers within parentheses.

LIST OF WETLANDS

ADILABAD

Sirpur Kagaznagar (A. Pittie, R. Mathew)

Kadam (A. Pittie, R. Mathew)

Nirmal (A. Pittie, R. Mathew)

ANANTAPUR

Perur (Chitravati River) (S. Sreevatsa)

Guntakal (Pathakota tank near Gooti) (S. Sreevatsa)

CHITTOOR

Pedda Tippa Samudram (V. Santharam)

Srikalahasti (V. Santharam)

CUDDAPAH

Nandalur (Rajashekar Tummala)

SE of Somasila (Rajashekar Tummala)

EAST GODAVARI

Draksharamam (Mrutyumjaya Rao, Vasu Rao)

Puniakshetram (Mrutyumjaya Rao, Vasu Rao)

GUNTUR

Tsundur (Mrutyumjaya Rao, Pramodh)

Uppalapadu (Mrutyumjaya Rao, Pramodh)

KARIMNAGAR

Lower Manair (Vasu Rao, Srinivasulu)

Sultanabad Tank (Vasu Rao, Srinivasulu)

KHAMMAM

Palair (Kiran)

KRISHNA

Kaikalluru (Seshagiri Rao)

Venkatapuram (near Nandigama) (Mrutyumjaya Rao)

KURNOOL

Chinna Tummadam (S. Sreevatsa)

Sangameshwar Backwaters (Vasu Rao, Srinivasulu)

Nandyal Tank (Srinivasulu)

MAHBUBNAGAR

Jatprole (Kiran)

Palem Reservoir (Vasu Rao)

Kodangal (Kalyani)

MEDAK

Pocharam (Moorthy, Rajeev Mathew)

Singur (Kulkarni)

NALGONDA

Kodad (Siraj Taher)

Miryalguda Complex (Siraj Taher)

NELLORE

Kaligiri (Mrutyumjaya Rao, Vasu Rao)

Gudur (Vasu Rao)

Bhudanam (Vasu Rao)

NIZAMABAD

Nizam Sagar backwaters (Sushil Kapadia)

PRAKASHAM

Jamukkaladinne (Podili) (Mrutyumjaya Rao)

Cumbum (Rajeev Mathew)

RANGAREDDI

Pargi Complex (Ashok Kumar)

SRIKAKULAM

Telikunchi (Ichhapuram) (Mrutyumjaya Rao)

Telineelapuram & Naupada Swamps (Mrutyumjaya Rao)

VIZIANAGARAM

Gosthani (Rajeev Mathew)

WARANGAL

Nirukula, Bhadrakali, Katakshapur, Lakhnnavaram (A. Pittie)

Kazipet Tank (A. Pittie)

WEST GODAVARI

Kolleru (Seshagiri Rao)

Akkivedu (Seshagiri Rao)

ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS 2002

It is my pleasure to announce the forthcoming Asian Waterfowl Census 2002 (AWC 2002) census. This will be a great activity to be carried out in conjunction with the upcoming New Year, an activity with birds. The AWC 2002 will be carried out between 5 (Saturday) - 20 (Sunday) January, which includes three weekends. If you are unable to collect information during this period, counts made in December 2001 to February 2002 are still important and acceptable.

Kindly note that the forms distributed in 2000 and 2001 are still the current count and site forms. These can be downloaded from the website, <http://www.wetlands.org/AP/awc/awcmain.html>.

The AWC 2002 is celebrating its 16th anniversary. In the past many of you have consistently supported this work, while some of you may have just recently involved. However your support have greatly contributed to this conservation effort.

As a global programme based on strong local involvement, the AWC does not only promote the local and national conservation activities, capacity building and public awareness, it also contributes to the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy: 2001-2005, the Asian Red Data Book of Birds and Important Bird Areas, as well as in the implementation of the strategic plans of the Ramsar Convention, Bonn Convention and Convention of Biological Diversity.

I would like to encourage all of you to actively participate in this interesting and valuable activity to promote waterbird and wetland conservation. I wish all of you an enjoyable field experience and hopefully some interesting discoveries.

Updating of the AWC website

The AWC website <http://www.wetlands.org/AP/awc/awcmain.html> have been recently updated. We encourage you to visit our website for information on the AWC and to download count and site forms, counting techniques and other useful information.

India

The AWC is coordinated by the Bombay Natural History Society. The National Coordinator Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, is assisted by his colleagues, Mr. M. Zafar-ul Islam and Mr. Veera Mahesh. There are 15 Regional Coordinators appointed by the BNHS who are co-organizing the census. In 2001, over 200 volunteers participated in the census. [For Andhra Pradesh the Regional Coordinator is Mr Siraj A.

Taher, President, Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh-Editors.]

During the 2001 census, 205 sites were assessed and 147 species of waterbirds totalling 1,534,800 were recorded. The endangered species list include the Spot-billed Pelican, Dalmatian Pelican, Lesser Adjutant, Greater Adjutant, Baer's Pochard, Sarus Crane, Sociable Plover, Nordmann's Greenshank, Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Indian Skimmer.

The BNHS is currently preparing for the organization of the forthcoming AWC in 2002 with the help of the Regional Coordinators. We look forward to a more fruitful result and extended coverage for the 2002 census.

[David Li, AWC International Coordinator, Wetlands International-Asia Pacific, <david@wiap.nasionet.net>]

Editors' Note: Readers interested in participating in this annual project should contact Mr Siraj Taher by phone (6612608) or at the Society's address (see end of p. 8) for Count Forms.

A National Symposium on Avian Bio-diversity Issues and Conservation Strategies is being organised by the Society for Applied Ornithology (SAO) from 7-8 February 2002, at Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500030 (Andhra Pradesh, India).

Scientific themes include: Avian ecology; Avian physiology and conservation; Anthropogenic pressure on bird habitat; Birds in agricultural landscape; Birds and aquaculture; Behaviour; Birds and transmission of diseases; Birds in protected and unprotected areas; Habitat preference; Important bird area; Threatened birds of India; Wetland birds.

Registration fees are as follows: Authors of papers Rs.800/-; Accompanying person/spouse Rs.500/-; SAO Life Member Rs.600/-; Student Member Rs.400/-. The fee should be sent by Demand Draft favouring Secretary, Society for Applied Ornithology, payable at State Bank of Hyderabad, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500030.

For Registration Forms and other details please contact Dr P. Syamsunder Rao, Project Coordinator, AINP on Agricultural Ornithology, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500030. Phone: 040-4015754. Fax: 040-4001786. E-mail: pcorni@hd2.dot.net.in. Website: www.saoindia.com.

HIGH-WIRE ROBOT TACKLES MESSY BIRDS

A tightrope-walking robot could soon be used to scare away birds perched on overhead power cables. In many urban areas the droppings from birds perched on overhead wires pose a health hazard and can cause damage to property and vehicles by corroding paintwork.

The robot deterrent is called a Self-Sustained Induction Deferrer (SID). It is designed to crawl along overhead cables gathering power from the wire as it travels.

SID was developed and designed by Enda Young and Brendan Quinn at St Patrick's College, Maghera in Northern Ireland in response to a severe local problem. Northern Electricity receives around forty complaints a month from local residents concerning bird droppings.

"It's a very big problem world-wide," says Northern Electricity engineer Robert O'Connell. The company has tried plastic owls, flashing lights and even sirens but the birds quickly become accustomed to the disturbance. "The sirens scared local people more than the birds," he told New Scientist.

Powering these devices has also proved a problem. Batteries require frequent replacement and solar power does not work at night, when the birds are roosting.

By contrast, SID is self-sufficient as it takes its power by induction from the 11kilovolt cable it is perched on. It does this by turning itself into a large split current transformer in combination with the power line.

This mechanism not only provides energy for the red and yellow robot, but also powers stroboscopic lights and a rendition of the noise created by a flock of starlings. Finally, to try and prevent Sid becoming predictable, computer software randomises its movements.

The robot is protected from power surges in the power line by a high power load resistor and high current polyswitch. A high temperature sensing circuit also protects the device from overheating and a low temperature sensor protects it from damage by ice on the wire.

The invention has not yet been extensively tested and has yet to be proved to deter the birds over long periods and work in all weather conditions.

But Northern Electricity will provide funding for further tests and will finance a production model, if testing goes well. The invention has won Young and Quinn the Young Engineers for Britain 2001 award, presented in London in September.

[Will Knight in New Scientist 20 September 2001
(contributed by P. Balu)]

BIRD PROTECTION AT CHILKA BY WILD ORISSA

Poaching of migrants, especially ducks, has always been a problem at Chilka despite the efforts of the Forest and other Govt. Departments by way of Patrol and through introduction of developmental activities. Wild Orissa, an NGO committed to protection of wilderness areas in the state has been concentrating in the Chilka region for the past 3 years. A major breakthrough was achieved by the Society in two prominent villages in the region viz.; Mangalajodi and Sorana, where the villagers had publicly took an oath to give up bird trapping. Thanks to the efforts of the Forest Dept and the Chilka Development Authority and the continuous monitoring by the members of Wild Orissa! The villagers have not returned to trapping despite extreme crunch experienced by them in their transition to more acceptable ways of livelihood. The Bird Protection Committee, 'Mahabir

Pakshi Surakshya Samiti' of Mangalajodi village organised by Wild Orissa has been active and the villagers have taken time off their economic pursuits to associate with the Forest Dept in patrolling their as well as the adjacent habitats. This active conservation effort by these villagers has had a demonstration effect on the neighbouring villages. The conservation message was simple - Chilka belonged to the people living around it and the interests and aspirations of these people depended on the survival of Chilka. On one of its visits to Chilka to monitor the habitats on 16 November 2001, the members of Wild Orissa were elated to note the healthy numbers of migratory Duck and other species that had arrived. The flyways of the Pintail possibly crossed paths with the Tomahawks in the war theatre, nevertheless, the species was present in good numbers. The other migrants sighted in good numbers were Whistling Teal, Lesser Whistling Teal, Common Pochard, Brahminy Duck, and Fantail Snipe. The results of the active protection afforded by the Bird Protection Committees was evident in the large numbers of resident birds like Coot, Bronze winged and Pheasant tailed Jacanas, the Purple and White breasted Moorhen whose juveniles were also sighted in good numbers. These have bred quite successfully in these protected habitats near the villages of Sorana, Mangalajodi and Kumandala.

The breakthrough mentioned above is a major success story in conservation in recent times. But there are a further 178 villages to be addressed. Illegal prawn cultivation and bird trapping is still a prominent activity in these villages although we find it difficult to acknowledge this fact from the state's capital. A half-day patrolling/monitoring by the members of Mahabir Bird Protection Committee of Mangalajodi and the members of Wild Orissa yielded several net traps in the areas adjoining of Panchapatia and Jaripada villages, which were about 10 kms from the Mangalajodi village. A total of 5 Purple moorhen and a Bronze winged Jacana were rescued and released. One Moorhen, which was injured, was handed over to the Forester, Muketeswar. These nets were probably set in the wee hours and could have trapped Whistling Teal and other nocturnal feeders in the following night. The members were able to photograph these traps and convince some poachers who were still active in this sphere. Wild Orissa with the co-ordination of the state forest department and the Chilka Development Authority is active and has already caused a severe dent in such poaching activities in and around the villages of Mangalajodi, Sorana, Kumandala, Jatiapatna, Chilkasahi. This exercise requires further progress, but with meager financial position of Wild Orissa, it is being a stumbling block.

[Sunil Kumar sunilfelis@hotmail.com]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-47

"The early Chinese around 500 B.C. listed in the Erh-ya 53 species of insects, while Aristotle recorded 47 species and Pliny in Rome 300 years later 61. Today the number of described species is approaching the million mark, while almost certainly an equal number remain to be discovered and described [the estimate now is close to 30 million species!-K.G.]. Despite the immense progress of the past the tasks still facing entomology are formidable and any contribution which can be made by the dedicated amateur should be given every possible encouragement by professionals. The enthusiasm of the one combined with the experience and skills of the other will always prove a felicitous combination which can only benefit the science to which we are all devoted."

"In view of the overwhelming professionalism of entomology today, what contribution of importance can now be made by the amateur? The life histories of many of the commoner insects are not fully known and the detailed work of rearing individual species is the sort of work admirably suited to the limited time and means of younger amateurs. Careful observation will reveal many unknown facts."

"The achievement of any original taxonomic work by amateurs becomes increasingly difficult. The multiplicity of species, the complexity of the code of nomenclature and the proliferation of literature, now published in numerous languages, necessitate years of patient study and work before one can venture into original publication. Few amateurs are prepared to devote their entire free time for years on end to entomological study of this kind which alone will qualify them as taxonomists."

[Kenneth A. Spencer, 1967, "The Role of the Amateur in Entomology", *Quaestiones Entomologicae*, 3: 1-2]

"The record of 'amateurs' in systematic zoology will not justify the opinion (of those scientists who insist on observation of the results of laboratory experiments) that amateurs are deleterious and unscientific. Taxonomy is the field of observation of the results of nature's experiments; in this occupation there is no sharp line between self-trained scientists and those that earned a Ph.D. in a university laboratory. Many of the most prolific taxonomists have started out in such prosaic jobs as locomotive factory worker, housewife, professional collector, or physician, as well as in such more glamorous situations as gentleman of leisure, member of the House of Lords, or officer in the army."

[Richard E. Blackwelder, 1977, "Twenty five years of Taxonomy", *Systematic Zoology*, 26: 117]

"Never be ashamed to use the words 'I don't know'. This is one of the most useful phrases in the English language, since if you admit your ignorance you will find the world full of people who are only too delighted to teach you. True naturalists love to share their knowledge. The first time I was in Western Australia, I spent three days being taken around by a local ornithologist. She showed me all the beautiful birds that lived in the area, about which I was woefully ignorant. When I left, I thanked her most sincerely for her help and patience. 'Not at all' she replied, 'I should thank you. I have had three lovely days, and, apart from the pleasure, I had never realized before how much I know about our birds'."

"We greatly enjoy the world, and we have always done our best to respect and protect it; we hope that you will do the same. Our planet is beautifully intricate, brimming over with enigmas to be solved and riddles to be unravelled. As a naturalist you will never suffer from that awful modern disease called boredom-so go out and greet the natural world with curiosity and delight, and enjoy it."

"In the years ahead, naturalists have a vital role to play in the future of the world. Next to professional scientists they are one of the most important groups of people, for with their help in learning about the world, and in protecting it and persuading others to protect it, they will become the guardians of our planet and of our welfare as a species."

"Let us take a look at the future as it is predicted today and see how naturalists can help repair some of the damage done so far. It is a fairly gloomy picture..."

"During the next twenty years, as our numbers increase by half, it is believed that one-third of the world's arable land [= cultivable soil-K.G.] may be destroyed in one way or another. ...Half the tropical forests will be gone in twenty years, and with them their many treasures. The seas of the world are treated as giant cesspools instead of living breathing animals...they have become the world's dustbin for everything from nerve gas to sewage."

"One of the greatest problems is that many people, especially those in government and those working in the huge businesses that exploit natural resources all over the world, are under the impression that these things don't matter. They turn a blind eye to the problems, or they try to give the impression that if there are any problems then our brilliant technology can cope. This is untrue; in spite of the cleverness of man, our world is being destroyed more quickly than technology can repair the damage-if it can ever be repaired."

"The naturalists of the future will play a more important part in the development and protection of the planet than did the naturalists of years ago, simply because the task is so urgent. Our extraordinary technology can be turned to the naturalist's aid. ..."

"Whether you look through a microscope or a magnifying glass, whether you study tropical forest or a tiny city garden, you are gaining knowledge about how the world works. With this knowledge comes understanding; then, as a naturalist who understands the workings of ecosystems (our life-support systems, in fact), you can explain to others what is going wrong and, most important, why it is going wrong. You can help teach others how to live within nature's rules. In the past, by bending or disregarding these rules, we have put our future and the future of many other species in jeopardy...It is up to the naturalists of the world to show them how to enjoy and protect that heritage."

[Gerald & Lee Durrell, 1982, "The Amateur Naturalist", pp. 9-10, 374-376]

Osho, the ornithologist, as Japan-born Humayun Abdulali [B.A. (Hons)] was called affectionately by his close friends and family, was an amateur on his own admission. But, he represents to me a fine example of an amateur bird watcher-cum-naturalist learning the necessary steps to scientific Ornithology and mastering even the intricate and highly demanding special subject of taxonomy and classification. He was a "model" I will now use to encourage a few of my readers who may possess the intellect, the perseverance and the drive to evolve into para-ornithologists at least, with the knowledge and the experience to provide critical inputs into databases on our sub-continent's Ornithology. The vast majority of our bird watchers today are "bird fanciers" (of Hume), rank amateurs by definition, without any training in the science of Ornithology. This is a fact and should in no way hurt the 'ego' of such persons.

The quotations selected above clearly indicate the absolutely critical need for inspired amateurs and trained professionals to work together, to first clarify our bird species limits and clear the present confusion about true identities, and then to add to our databases on each distinct species and its relationships (ecology) with the others it interacts with in life. Input of such amateurs is greatly needed now but my only real concern is that these people generally work on their own, without much information or databases at hand, or to refer to, so they see only a part of the picture and therefore are liable to make grave mistakes and wrong judgements. Research is the foundation of conservation effort, as N.J. Collar (1997, *Bull. British Ornithol. Club*, 117: 122-136) was recently quoted in *Pitta*, but very little high-quality research is now being done in our countries here. Data not properly analysed can be misinterpreted, leading to inappropriate conservation measures and policies. International collaboration is a must if we are to have any hope in saving our wildlife and wildernesses. Will we seek it from the appropriate specialists who will conduct this "Green Army" of players now needed to help conserve our natural heritage?

My first meeting with Humayun Abdulali was in the last week of January 1999 at his Bombay flat where I found him very interesting and good company. His library was a great source of information and on my next visit (23-27 April 2001) I made a complete list of all the books and journals he possessed. I also made quite a few notes from his annotations in some of his books and bound journals or papers. I found, with great delight, in Frank Finn's (who was then Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Museum, Calcutta) book on "How to know the Indian Waders" (1920) Humayun's note saying "My first bird book-H.A. 22/1/30" and this corresponds with his entry "Started bird watching in the year: c. 1930" made in the questionnaire I sent him for my "Directory of Indian Bird watchers" in 1991. In another book "Indian Birdlife, or the struggle for existence of birds in India" by Douglas Dewar (1925) I found a note written to Humayun which read "To my Darling Osho, with lots of love, and many happy returns of the day, from Sakina, 19th May 1932 [Humayun's 18th birthday—K.G.], which, I believe, finally settles the exact date of his birth.

Checking my correspondence files at home in my study I found that Abdulali had sent me his first letter dated 31st October 1974 asking me if I could help collect "some game birds, particularly *Galloperdix lunulata* and *Perdica asiatica*, specimens of which would help to clarify some of the problems regarding subspecific identity. In spite [sic!—K.G.] of what you say regarding subspecies [in my Sandur avifauna paper published in *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 70: 499-531; 1974], I trust that you will appreciate the value of the work..." I now have realized that what he considered important as "subspecies" are actually good species that Humayun 'saw' and wished to make known to Ornithology! More letters, typewritten, and later handwritten, followed about ornithological matters, and before he died Humayun also used the Internet, getting his eldest son Akbar to correspond with me, on his behalf, by e-mail! In one letter sent in August 1991, in reply to mine, Humayun wrote me that he "was flattered to be linked with Biswas..." admitting the professional standing and expertise of late Biswamoy Biswas of the Zoological Survey of India, whose work is also little-known to amateur bird watchers today and who seem oblivious of anyone else but late Salim Ali as the only 'icon' of Indian Ornithology, which, I believe, is a great pity. Until this year Humayun was interacting with me on ornithological problems and what I experienced personally in his own home in Bombay, for almost a week, heightened my respect and admiration for one whose work has had few 'takers', unfortunately.

Abdulali's bibliography, as mentioned in my Letter # 46 last month, consists of almost 350 titles, a little over 200 of them on birds, actually 239 plus 2 more if parts 36 & 38 of the "Catalogue of the Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Collection" are also his work and not only of Saraswathy Unnithan's as wrongly (?) printed in the *JBNHS*. I am preparing "An annotated List of the publications of Humayun Abdulali (1914-2001)", this being modelled on a similar list published by E.C. Dickinson of Herbert G. Deignan's works, in 1970 (*Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.*, 23: 409-444). I will also publish a list of his bird library and I mention here a few annotations I found on some of his books, for the pleasure of readers - "Out of the blue! April 1946-HA" (in his copy of Deignan's *THE BIRDS OF NORTHERN THAILAND*, 1945); "Thrown at me" by Ripley in a Bombay Hotel on its release (Ripley's *NEW SYNOPSIS*, 1982); "To a Tartar & a barter in eggs!" from Fr Palaceos of St Xavier's College, "ca 1932" (Stuart Baker's *NIDIFICATION* Volume 1, 1932); "To myself, Rs 13/-, 16th Jan 1962" (A *PICTURE BOOK OF SIKKIM BIRDS* by Salim Ali, 1960); "Complimentary copy by V.C.A." (Ambedkar's *SOME INDIAN WEAVER BIRDS*, 1964); "To Humayun Abdulali with kind regards from the author, Feb. 1935" (Whistler's *POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS*, 2nd edn, 1935); "From Martha Edens who obtained it at Nedora Hotel, Srinagar on 23/9/57, to H.A. on 11/12/57" (Stevens' *NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE SIKKIM HIMALAYAS* in the *JBNHS*, 1923-1925); "From Bell's collection" (bound pages from the *JBNHS* on *BIRDS OF PREY* - many of T.R.D. Bell's books are in Humayun's library); "The temptation of good illustrations" (Bates' *BIRD LIFE IN INDIA*, 1931); "To Mr. Abdulali, I hope you'll find this useful in your studies of Indian birds. I'll directly send you the BOC articles you asked for. Best wishes, Pamela C. Rasmussen, 2-12-'97" (Burg et al.'s *ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY*, 1994); "Received from the author at Salim Ali Meet at Borivli 1996" (Pittie's *BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX*, 1995).

The other amateur, "a gifted, self taught naturalist", who I select as another "model" for readers and whose books gave me great reading pleasure and inspiration in my younger years, is the late Gerald Durrell (1925-1995). He was born in Jamshedpur (Bihar, India) but soon after he and his family left for England when he was "infected" with an insatiable love for animals and turned into a professional collector for zoos. Buy his books and read them, like you should those of Jim Corbett and Kenneth Anderson, and your life will not remain the same any more! After Durrell's first book "The Overloaded Ark" was published in 1953, 36 more followed, with delightfully provocative titles like "Three Singles to Adventure", "The Whispering Land", "The Bafut Beagles", "A Zoo in my Luggage", "The Drunken Forest", "The New Noah", "Encounters with Animals", "Catch me a Colobus", "Rosy is my Relative", "Two in the Bush", "Birds, Beasts and Relatives", "Filets of Plaiice", "Beasts in my Belfry", "Island Zoo", and, his best humour-laced creation "My Family and other Animals". His books are a delight and are illustrated with very fine pen-and-ink sketches and some maps and are full of geography, yes, lots of it, with outdoor adventure and travel, intermingled in a saucy, seductive style. Durrell founded the Jersey Zoo in 1959 on the largest of the English Channel islands and lived a life of wandering the world's wildernesses ever since he was 21, when he made his initial personally financed, organized and led collecting expedition to the then British Cameroons in western Africa. His "The Amateur Naturalist" sums up the singular character of a "born naturalist" (can they be "made", I ask?), in his and his second wife Lee's words - "Look upon our work more as the hors d'oeuvre at the beginning of a splendid meal, as an appetizer which we hope will encourage you to read the numerous brilliant books on natural history."

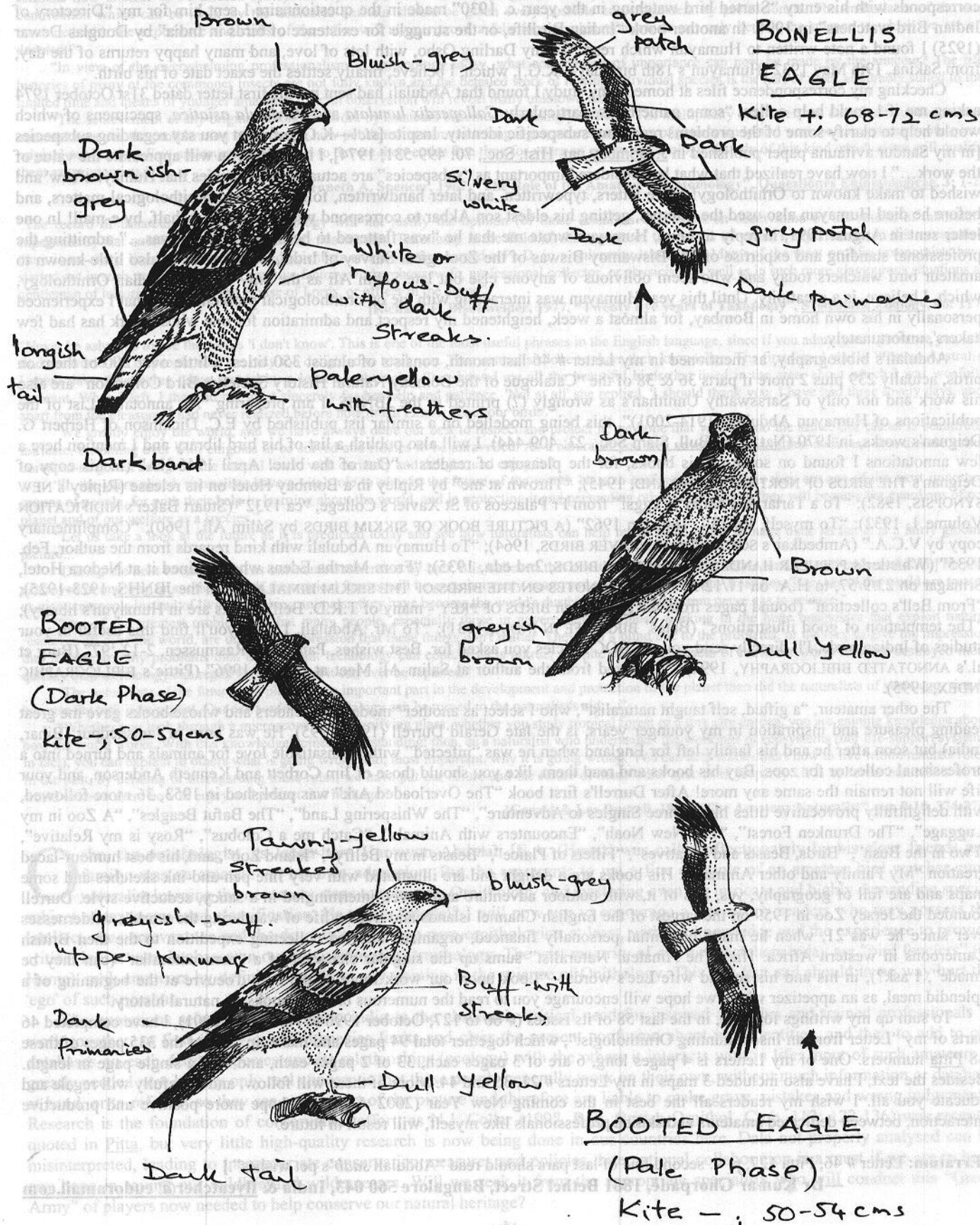
To sum up my writings for *Pitta*, in the last 58 of its issues (# 66 to 127, October 1996 to November 2001), I have completed 46 parts of my "Letter from an Insect-hunting Ornithologist", which together total 94 pages and make up 28% of the 335 pages of these 58 *Pitta* numbers. One of my Letters is 4 pages long, 6 are of 3 pages each, 33 of 2 pages each, and 6 of a single page in length. Besides the text, I have also included 3 maps in my Letters # 21, 35 and 44. More of these will follow, and hopefully will regale and educate you all. I wish my readers all the best in the coming New Year (2002 A.D.) and hope more positive and productive interaction, between dedicated amateurs and skilled professionals like myself, will result in future.

[Erratum: Letter # 46, *Pitta* 127, p. 4: second line of last para should read "Abdulali *saab's* pet wishes".]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

These "Hawk-Eagles" differ from true Eagles in being generally slender in build, smaller beaks and thinner and longer tarsi and tail. In this group several phases of plumage (some very light or pale) can be sometimes seen, making identification difficult.



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status* (indicated on first usage) follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.). Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu 10.x.2001 (KMR)

SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* CB, 60 active N; LITTLE CORMORANT 250; OPENBILL STORK c. 7,000, CB, 600 N; WHITE IBIS NT* 1,200, CB, N; GLOSSY IBIS 2,500 roosting population.

SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT

Naupada Swamps 4.xi.2001 (KMR)

Near Meghavaram & Kakarapalli

SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 2; PAINTED STORK NT* 6; UNIDENTIFIED DUCKS c. 12,000; GREY-HEADED LAPWING**

2.

Near Reddikala Sunnapalli

SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 9.

Telineelapuram 4.xi.2001 (KMR)

SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 109, CB 64 active N, 6 under const.; PAINTED STORK NT* 230, CB, 107 N.

Telukunchi 1.xi.2001 (KMR)

OPENBILL STORK c. 6,000, CB, 1,126 N.

DELHI

Okhla and nearby areas

29.ix (MK): WHITE IBIS NT* 15; REDHEADED MERLIN 1 on pole.

30.ix (MK,BH): DARTER NT* 7; PAINTED STORK NT* 20; WHITE IBIS NT* 5; GULLBILLED TERN 40; BLACKBELLIED TERN NT*

3; HORNED LARK 1 ad., M (this is the first record for the region).

7.x. (ND): WHITETAILED STONE CHAT (uncommon).

10.x (ND,BH): REDHEADED MERLIN 1 pair.

6.xi (BH): SHOVELLER c. 5,000; COMMON POCHARD c. 1,000;

TUFTED DUCK c. 200; COOT c. 1,200; SWALLOW 1,000+.

18.xi (ND): GREATER SCAUP 1 (uncommon); GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1.

20.xi (BH,BG,ND): OPENBILL STORK 46; RUDDY SHELDUC 42.

27.xi (BH): KENTISH PLOVER 220; BLACKHEADED GULL 3,000+.

Sanjay Van

25.xi (BH): DARK GREY BUSHCHAT 1 F/imm.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai Wetland

29.ix (BH,SC): BLACKNECKED STORK NT* 1 F; WHITE IBIS NT* 50; REDHEADED MERLIN 2; COMMON CRANE 5 (earliest date); SARUS CRANE VU* 2; AVOCET 50; FANTAIL SNIPE 20.

16.x (BH): WHITE IBIS NT* 50; BLACK IBIS 50; SPOONBILL 2; FERRUGINOUS DUCK NT* 4; COMB DUCK 34 incl., juv; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 2; BAILLON'S CRAKE 1; CURLEW 15; JACK SNIPE 1.

1.xi (BH,LV): PAINTED STORK NT* 7; LESSER KESTREL VU* 1 ad., M; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair with a juv., + 4 ad., in flt; LARGE SAND PLOVER 2 adult (new record for Haryana).

24.xi (BH,others): GLOSSY IBIS 150; BARHEADED GOOSE 280; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; MARSH HARRIER 12; SARUS CRANE VU* a pair + 1 juv., in flt; WHITE-TAILED LAPWING 35+; JACK SNIPE 2; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 3 (uncommon); BLACK-HEADED BUNTING 1 F (uncommon).

Sultanpur National Park

29.ix (BH): PAINTED STORK VU* 50 pairs br.

6.x (BH,others): EUROPEAN ROLLER 1 (uncommon).

26.x (SS,AS): SHORT-EARED OWL 1; PAINTED STORK VU* heronry of 40 pairs.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary

14.xi (BH,PH): BLACKNECKED STORK NT* 1 M; SPOONBILL 24; IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 1 ad; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 2 imm; LESSER KESTREL VU* 1 pair; SARUS CRANE VU* 2; REDHEADED BUNTING 30+.

ROHTAK DISTRICT

Tilyar Lake and the surrounding area

10.x (SCS,SM): WHITEBACKED VULTURE CR* 2+1; GREAT HORNED OWL 1, raising wings and cocking up tail near a 1m snake; EUROPEAN ROLLER 1 (uncommon).

SONIPAT DISTRICT

Delhi Canal (near Rohat village)

1.xi (AB,SCS): CORMORANT 250 incl., few juv on Eucalyptus; PAINTED STORK VU* 14; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair with 1 juv., +2+2.

8.xi (SCS,SM): WHITE IBIS NT* 20; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 1 ad., swallowing a 0.67m live snake, head first; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+2; REDRUMPED SWALLOW c. 5,000; SIND SPARROW 18.

Drain Number Eight (SCS)

29.ix: PAINTED STORK NT* 7; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+2; RED-HEADED BUNTING 8.

30.ix: LITTLE GREEN HERON 1 ad., in br., plm., (near Rithal village).

8.x: (SCS,SM): VERDITER FLYCATCHER 1 in mango grove (uncommon).

24.xi: COLLARED SAND MARTIN 3 (uncommon).

25.xi: DARTER NT* 6+2 in flt; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* a pair; BROWN CRAKE 2+1.

JNL Feeder Canal (nearest town Gohana)

30.ix (SCS,SM): BLACK IBIS 18; GREY SHRIKE 1+1+1+1+2; ROSY PASTOR 400+; YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW 100+ on babul tree chirping noisily.

6.x (SCS): OPENBILL STORK 6; BRAHMINY KITE 1 ad., (uncommon); WHITEBACKED VULTURE CR* 1 in flt; LESSER KESTREL VU* 1 pair in flt.

23.xi (SCS): CORMORANT c. 500 on Eucalyptus; PAINTED STORK NT* 23 on Eucalyptus; WHITEBACKED VULTURE CR* 2 in flt; SPANISH SPARROW c. 10,000 feeding in tall grasses along canal; BLACKHEADED BUNTING 5 feeding in paddies (uncommon).

Juan wetland

7.x (SCS,SM,AB): SARUS CRANE VU* 2+3 (while 2 were feeding on the paddies, 1 was display-dancing).

Mohamedabad marshes

2.x (SCS,SM): DARTER NT* 4, PAINTED STORK NT* 1; OPENBILL STORK 6; WHITE IBIS NT* 6; BLACK IBIS 2+1+2; SPOONBILL 12; FERRUGINOUS DUCK NT* 10; SIND SPARROW 1 M chirping on a *Prosopis juliflora* bush.

7.x (SCS,SM,AB): RUFOUSTAILED SHRIKE 1+1+1+1; CRESTED BUNTING 1 F (uncommon).

22.xi (SCS): CORMORANT 300+ on Eucalyptus; PAINTED STORK NT* 7 in flt + 8 on Peepal tree; STARLING c. 500; REDHEADED BUNTING 70+ flock in OH flt (uncommon).

YAMUNANAGAR DISTRICT**Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary**

19,20,21.ix (BH,SCS,WP): The following new species were observed for Haryana as well as for the sanctuary: HOBBY; SLATYHEADED PARAKEET; LARGER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER; COLLARED PYGMY OWLET; JUNGLE OWLET; PIED FLYCATCHER-SHRIKE; COMMON IORA; GOLDENFRONTED LEAFBIRD; SPOTTED BABBLER; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER; RUFOUSBREASTED BLUE FLYCATCHER; WHITEBROWED BLUE FLYCATCHER; WESTERN SLATY BLUE FLYCATCHER; TICKELL'S REDBREASTED BLUE FLYCATCHER; GREYHEADED FLYCATCHER-WARBLER; BLUE WHISTLING THRUSH; VELVETFRONTED NUTHATCH; RUBYCHEECK.

Western Yamuna Canal (Dadupur Headworks)

19.ix (BH,RSK,SCS,others): CUCKOO 1 ad., M (uncommon).

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-

include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Anchal Sondhi (AS); Anil Bhola (AB); Bikram Grewal (BG); Bill Harvey (BH); K Mrutyumjaya Rao (KMR); Lalitha Vijayan (LV); Martin Kelsey (MK); Nikhil Devasar (ND); Paulene Harvey (PH); Rajiv S. Kalsi (RSK); Sanjay Sondhi (SS); Sunita Chaudhury (SC); Suramya Mudgal (SM); Suresh C Sharma (SCS); William Petrick (WP).

****EDITORS' COMMENT:** This is the 2nd record of *Vanellus cinereus* from A.P., after Colin Conroy's 12 birds at Machilipatnam in February 2001 (Pitta #119, p. 2, 6).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST**Distribution of Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus***

"It is always a pleasure to read Pitta. Most of the articles are interesting but I particularly like the feature 'Spotlight' in which you discuss distribution and status of a species. However, I find that in some cases, latest information is lacking or the existing information is not presented in a rational manner. For instance, in the latest issue of *Pitta* (No. 127, November 2001), Mr Siraj A. Taher shows the patchy distribution of Cinererous vulture *Aegypius monachus*. He has shown by cross marks its records from Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, etc, and even Kerala (where it must be a vagrant) but he has left the whole of Rajasthan blank. More surprizingly, it is shown as a regular winter visitor on the Pakistan side of the Thar Desert but not on the Indian side as if the birds recognise political boundaries."

"The Cinereous Vulture is not uncommon in the Indian Thar Desert in winter. For instance, during 1993-94, I saw 26 individuals on 13 different sites (Rahmani, 1997). During all my surveys in the Thar Desert in winter, I have seen this bird many times. It is seen in Bikaner, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Pali, Churu, Nagaur, Sikar and other dry districts of Rajasthan. It is even seen regularly in Sonkhaliya area in Ajmer district in eastern Rajasthan. I am sure it is found in other areas also."

"I suggest that you be very careful while making maps because the mistakes are too obvious. In the case of widespread species, it is better to show the general distribution, with marks on confirmed sites or individual stray records."

-Asad R. Rahmani, Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai, Maharashtra

[Rahmani, A.R. 1997. The effect of Indira Gandhi Nahar Project on the avifauna of the Thar Desert. *Jour. Bombay Natural Hist. Soc.* 94: 233-266.]

"Happy Diwali and congratulations on Internet version of PITTA. I wish to thank you for including my posting regarding Khichan in it (Pitta #127, November 2001, p. 2). Can you make a connection in this? In the conservation status table 3 the following line is incorrect- 'CITES: Appendix II' should be 'CITES: Lower Risk (least concern)'. I apologise for my mistake. It was pointed out earlier and I sent an apology on the nathistory and oriental birding e-groups."

-Dhirendra Devarshi, Rajasthan

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

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A VERY HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!**

IP TTA



8/1
2002

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 129: January 2002

PROGRAMME

Indexed 25/3/2002 f.

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 27-i-2002: Pargi Wetland Complex, Rangareddi District: Route: On the Vikarabad road, Hyderabad—Chevella—Manneguda cross roads—Pargi, approximately 120kms one-way. Start from Panjagutta (old Shanbhag) at 6.45am. Members with vehicles are requested to volunteer lifts for others and make the trip a success. Please contact Siraj Taher (6612608) at the earliest and inform the number of seats available in your vehicle. Others should book early so seats can be reserved on first come first served basis. At Pargi is a complex of 3 wetlands; Laknapur, Mettekuduru and Ibrahimpur that were covered by S Ashok Kumar and Raajeev Mathew for the SACON project (see *Birding Notes* on p. 7). They report thousands of waterfowl. This will be a full-day trip. Carry water, snacks and lunch. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 21-i-2002, 6 p.m.: Discussion on SACON project. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Uppalapadu

K. Mrutyumjaya Rao

The situation at Uppalapadu is deteriorating every day. Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* have arrived earlier (by six weeks) than they did last year and their breeding activity is overlapping that of the Asian Openbill-Storks *Anastomus oscitans*. This has caused some Asian Openbill-Storks to vacate their nests as the number of nesting trees is limited and is actually getting less due to breakage, etc. There is no nesting space for the birds. So the Asian Openbill-Stork chicks that are about to leave the nests but are still dependent on parental feeding, have been forced off their nests and are wandering in adjacent paddy fields, unable to feed or fend for themselves. They are being chased by feral dogs and cats. In response to our information, three dead specimens were sent for a post mortem by the D.F.O. at Guntur. The analysis of this was that death was caused due to starvation. This is the pathetic situation in the last few weeks.

This is an Important Bird Area and as such the concerned authorities and NGOs like Bombay Natural History Society and the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh should act on a war footing to ensure the survival of the birds and this most important wetland.

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON GALLIFORMES

A 3-day National Symposium on Galliformes is being organised from 20-22 February 2002 at Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu and will cover a series of invited and contributed oral presentations following by discussions. The major theme of the symposium is conservation and management of galliformes in India. Besides these, the following topics will be covered: survey and distribution of galliformes in India; status of galliformes; habitat ecology and habitat utilization; habitat degradation;

conservation problems; conservation of galliformes; conservation genetics of wild ancestor Red Junglefowl; management of endangered and vulnerable species; diseases and health care; captive breeding; trade in galliformes; participation of stakeholders in the conservation, environmental education and awareness role of eco clubs in conservation. For further details contact Dr M.C. Sathyanarayana, Organizing Secretary, Division of Wildlife Biology, A.V.C. College (Autonomous), Mayiladuthurai 609305, T.N. E-mail: <galliformes2002@yahoo.co.in>. Phone: (Off.) 04364-29911, (Res.) 04364-25759.

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON CONSERVATION OF EASTERN GHATS: 24-26 March 2002

The Environment Protection Training and Research Institute (EPTRI), based in Hyderabad, is organizing a National Seminar on Conservation of Eastern Ghats from 24-26 March 2002 at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. A nominal registration fee of Rs250/- per participant is payable by Demand Draft to EPTRI, Hyderabad or at the venue in cash. Nominations for participation should reach the Coordinator by 28 February 2002. The main theme of the seminar is to address the conservation aspects of environment in Eastern Ghats in the following areas: Biological; Physical; Socio-economic; Programme and policies and, Information systems. Abstracts of papers (500 words) should reach the Coordinator by e-mail or hard copy by 20 January 2002. For further information contact: Coordinator, ENVIS, EPTRI, 91/4 Gachibowli, Hyderabad 500032, A.P., India. E-mail: baquer@eptri.com or info@eptri.com.

BANGLADESH WATERFOWL SURVEY

A wetland survey for wintering water birds in the south-eastern coastal mud flats of Bangladesh has thrown up great results. In a communication to the Oriental Birding Mailing List (dated 1.i.2002), Dr Ronald Halder (ronald@bdocm.com) said, "It was one of the most fruitful surveys to date. The most astonishing thing was the discovery of a very large concentration of **Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*. We found a flock of more than 150,000 birds. This kind of number has never been previously recorded in Bangladesh. Also notable in number was **Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* 6000+ and **Bar-headed Goose** *Anser indicus* 600+. Anyone interested in the full survey detail please contact me. Survey of Northern section of our wetland starts first week of February 2002."

OPERATION HARRIER

A BNHS / HAWK & OWL TRUST HARRIER SURVEY OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

If numbers of harriers regularly occur in your area but no roosts are known, please report this to us and try to locate where the harriers fly to and converge in the evening. If there are sites with deep, uncut grass, wetlands or other areas with thick ground vegetation, then these are likely places for a roost. Typical behaviour consists of 'milling', or a number of harriers flying seemingly randomly around the same small area until they decide where to settle for the night. Occasionally they roost on bare or ploughed ground. The roost sites are often in or near to expanses of open flat land or floodplain over which they hunt. The roost sites are often traditional, being used for many weeks or months and often winter after winter. Once found, they are therefore good birdwatching places.

Raptors are valuable indicators of the health of the environment. Both the recent realisation that India holds the largest recorded winter roost of harriers in the world (at Velavadar National Park in Gujarat) and the increasing pressure on Indian raptors (considering the recent decline in vulture populations, for example) have prompted us to instigate a survey to establish the distribution of winter concentrations of harriers whilst such birds remain relatively numerous. As generalist predators, they are attracted by

healthy populations of small prey. Because concentrations of harriers can be so large at roosts (up to 3000 harriers occur at Velavadar), even localised threats could have an effect on a significant population of their Asian populations.

The commonest species of harrier wintering in India are the Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* and the Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*. Recent developments in field guides are now of great assistance in separating these species in the field. The ecologies of the various species are different—the Marsh Harrier seems most at home feeding on waterfowl, fish and small mammals in wetlands. In croplands, grasslands and arid areas Montagu's Harriers gracefully quarter for small prey, often locusts and lizards, whilst the Pallid (or 'Pale') Harrier is more of a dashing hunter of small birds. These birds nest in Central Asia. Virtually their entire East Asian breeding populations may winter in the Indian Subcontinent. In the north of the Subcontinent, these three species are joined by Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus*, and in the east by the rarer Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* and the Eastern Marsh (or 'Striped') Harrier *Circus spilonotus*.

The BNHS in collaboration with the Hawk & Owl Trust of U.K. has been working on harriers for the last six years. The project has found a number of roosts in different parts of the country. The major roosts identified are in Velavadar National Park, Gujarat; Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan; Banni Grasslands, Kutch, Gujarat; Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh.

We would like to develop an inventory of all the roost sites of harriers in the country with your help, which shall go a long way in helping conservation. All contributions will be duly acknowledged and a report will be sent to all the contributors.

This is a request for you to check the best grassland or marsh in your area for about one hour until dusk for a roost of harriers between 15 and 30 January 2002.

Please write for forms to: BSAP, P.O. Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, or phone Aasheesh Pittie for them, at 6501535. Completed forms should be returned to BSAP for forwarding collectively to BNHS.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-48

"...Mr. Blyth's numerous and valuable papers, already mentioned in the Preface, and his efforts, by intercourse and correspondence, have contributed an impetus to the study of Natural History, that has done more to its extension in India, than all the previous publications. His 'Catalogue of Birds in the Museum Asiatic Society, Calcutta,' and Horsfield's 'Catalogue of Birds of the E.I.C. Museum in London,' have been most valuable aids to me, and are referred to under every species."

"I have avoided encumbering my work with numerous synonyms; but I have always quoted Blyth's and Horsfield's Catalogues, in both of which the reader will find the synonyms given at length; and I have, invariably cited such names as have been bestowed by Indian Ornithologists. I have also quoted Sykes' Catalogue, and my own, but none of the others, though I have frequently alluded to them in the descriptions. I have also given a reference to the best coloured figures extant; and, when more than one figure exists, in works devoted to Indian Zoology, I have quoted all. I have also bestowed an English name on all the Birds of India, and I trust many of these will be found appropriate, as I have, in general, attempted to make them, both popular and scientifically correct..."

[T.C. Jerdon, 1862, *Birds of India*, pp. xliii – xlv]

"At the earnest and repeated requests of numerous subscribers, I publish the subjoined very crude and tentative, LIST OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA."

It has been very hurriedly put together to meet an urgent and crying want, and will doubtless prove to embody innumerable errors and to require many additions as well as corrections."

"This list includes the Birds of the whole Empire, except Beluchistan, Afghanistan, Badakshan, Wakhan, &c., on the North-West; the Maldives, the Mergui Archipelago, and the western half of the Malay Peninsula.

I have for long had in hand a complete list including the birds of these also, (so far as they are known to me,) with the full specific synonymy of each species, together with its distribution within the Empire as a whole."

"Altogether 1,788 species are enumerated, of which, as at present informed, I should reject 106; the names of these latter I have printed in italics. Of the remaining 1,682, I have doubts of 74; and to these I have prefixed a note of interrogation. My larger list contains at present 1,917 species."

[A.O. Hume, 1879, "A Rough Tentative List of the Birds of India," *Stray Feathers* 8: 73, 75, 80]

"...Had not Mr. Oates come from India and devoted his furlough to the task, much delay would have been caused and the work, in all likelihood, much less completely executed, as I should probably have been compelled to write the greater part, if not the whole, myself."

"The number of species of birds to be described in the three [actually four—K.G.] volumes, of which this is the first, exceeds those enumerated in Jerdon's 'Birds of India' by more than one-half, chiefly because Jerdon omitted the species inhabiting Ceylon, Sind west of the Indus, the Western Punjab, Hazara, the Upper Indus Valley north and north-west of Kashmir, Assam, Burma and the intermediate countries (such as the Gáro, Khási and Nága hills, Chittagong, Sylhet, Cachar and Manipur), together with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, all of which are comprised within the limits of British India as accepted in the present publication. A large number of additional species have also been recorded, since Jerdon's work was published, from Sind, the Punjab, the North-western Provinces, Rajputana, and the Western Himalayas, the fauna of all of which has become better known within the last 25 years. The additional species from the Peninsula are far less numerous.

No branch of Zoology has, in India, attracted so much attention or enlisted the services of so many observers as Ornithology; and there is probably no division of Indian biological science, not even Botany, on which so much has been written and of which our present knowledge is so far advanced. Far more is known about the nomenclature, distribution, and habits of birds than about those of mammals, reptiles, or fishes..."

"Hitherto the progress of Indian ornithology may be divided into two periods; the first of which, ending with the publication of Jerdon's work, was especially signalized by the labours of Hodgson, Jerdon and Blyth, whilst in the more recent period the dominant figure has been Mr. Hume."

[W.T. Blanford's "Preface" in E.W. Oates, 1889, *The Fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma, Birds*. – Vol. I, pp. iii-iv, ix]

"The keys to genera and species in this and other volumes are intended solely to assist the determination of specimens, and do not necessarily depend on the characters of the greatest importance, nor do the generic keys always serve for species not found in India.

The English names used by Jerdon have been retained, except when they differ from those commonly used in England, or when they have been found to be no longer appropriate, owing either to improved knowledge of the bird's affinities or to the discovery of additional species..."

"The number of Indian birds regarded as distinct species in the present work, including the nine added in the Appendix, amount to 1626. Jerdon, from a much smaller area, described 1016. Hume's Catalogue of 1879 contained 1788 entries, of which he rejected 106 and regarded 74 as doubtful, leaving 1608, or nearly the same as the present enumeration..."

"A very considerable part of the present work is founded on the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum, and on the specimens preserved in the Museum Collections. It is difficult to exaggerate the obligations of both Mr. Oates and myself to Dr. R. Bowdler Sharpe and Mr. W. Ogilvie Grant, the officers in charge of the Bird Department. In several cases the labour of compiling this and other volumes has been lightened by access to unpublished parts of the Museum Catalogue."

[W.T. Blanford, 1898, *The Fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma, Birds*. – Vol. IV, pp. iv-v]

"It has been my endeavour in writing this volume to disturb as little as possible the classification adopted by Oates in the first edition but during the thirty-two years that have elapsed since his first volume was published, much scientific work has been done and many discoveries made which have rendered alterations imperative; some of these, unfortunately, are of a drastic nature.

"In the first place, the trinomial system has been adopted—a decision which has added very greatly to the number of birds to be described, i.e. to the total number of species and subspecies, though, on the other hand, it has reduced the number of species, for it has relegated to their proper positions as subspecies or geographical races many forms which have hitherto improperly held the status of species."

"The third period [of Indian Ornithology—K.G.] is that of Blanford and Oates, both leading Ornithologists in the preceding period [of A.O. Hume—K.G.] but completely dominating the position on the publication of the 'Avifauna of British India.' Since these volumes saw the light no big work has been published on Indian birds...In addition...the 'Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society' contains a mass of details on field ornithology..."

[E.C. Stuart Baker, 1922, *The Fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma, Birds*. – Vol. I (Second Edition), pp. 1, 3]

"The writing of the new edition was commenced by the author about January 1921, whilst the last of the six volumes containing the Birds was published in March 1929, the six volumes having been completed in eight years."

"During the time the author has been employed upon this work, other ornithologists have been busy both in the Field and in the Museum, and much excellent work has been done, notably by Messrs. Ticehurst, Whistler, Osmaston, and Meinertzhagen in the North and North-West, by Wait in Ceylon, and in the East by Messrs. Robinson, Kloss, La Touche, and others, who have done much important work. All these ornithologists have made collections of bird-skins which have been most beautifully prepared, with full data, and these have been of immense value in enabling the owners, as well as others, to work out geographical races. Much of the material, especially that of earlier dates, in the British Museum and other collections consists of specimens which were badly made up, not sexed, and often with insufficient data. In some cases types which had been mounted specimens in galleries, and which were greatly faded, were unmounted and wisely put away, though these had already so greatly altered in colour that they were almost useless for purposes of comparison..."

"...The total net addition to the Avifauna is 53 [in the Addenda-K.G.]. Adding these to the number of species and subspecies described in the first six volumes, we have a total of 2346 occurring within the Indo-Burmese countries. Dr. Hartert in his wonderful work on Palæarctic Avifauna recorded only 3198 species and subspecies for the whole of the Palæarctic Region, whilst Sclater in his two volumes of 'Systema Avium Æthiopicarum' admits 4561 for the Æthiopian Region [most of Africa and its outlying islands-K.G.], a comparison which shows the extraordinary wealth of bird-life in the Eastern Tropics."

"Field-naturalists, who often seem to think that their work is considered subordinate to that of the Museum-worker, should remember that the latter without the help of the former can do nothing at all. At the same time, the observer and collector in the field cannot carry out comparing and classification of the Aves, simply because he has neither the material nor the literature available. The work of Museum-workers and Field-naturalists is absolutely interdependent, and one cannot work satisfactorily without the other..."

[E.C. Stuart Baker, 1930, *The Fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma, Birds*. – Vol. VII (Second Edition), pp. iv-v, vii]

Physical features not political boundaries, performances not personalities, protection and restoration not proselytized "conservation" hype, "practice makes perfect" not just publicity and one-time "nature education," and perspective not prejudice. Perhaps this year I will need to focus the attention of my bird-fancier, bird watcher and trained ornithologist readers on a new approach to, and awareness of, the study and enjoyment of our feathered songsters that share this planet with us. I will need to take your attention away from the Cities, Districts, States or Countries which are not in the know of the birds we observe, and also introduce to you what abundant bird literature we have other than Sālim Ali's INDIAN HANDBOOK or the recent "illustrated guides" by foreigners, and from blind "animal activists" and so-called "conservationists" and "environmentalists" without research backgrounds, who keep you blissfully unaware of scientifically planned wildlife protection and restoration programmes already documented and available. This new millennium and century needs new approaches, a potent urgency and a "let's work together" attitude, if we are not to ultimately find ourselves crying and bemoaning the total annihilation, or certain impoverishment and decay, of the wild ecosystem treasures of this subcontinent, created through several hundred millennia of biological evolution. After initiating "Project Tiger", the developed, advanced countries can do nothing more in future if we ourselves cannot demonstrate discipline and resolve to protect and restore our own biodiversity.

I will first escort you through a brief, pointed history of almost 300 years of surveys and research, and later of the native naturalist's amateur hobby and interest, in our flora and fauna, especially birds. Then, I will introduce you to our subcontinent's biogeography in a little more detail than heretofore communicated in these Letters. The basic taxonomy of our region's bird taxa was also presented by me earlier but some more data on the Systematic Ornithology researches carried out on our avifauna, which most definitely contains more than 1600 good species (if we also include geographically relevant areas, like the Afghani highlands and the western Burmese mountains east to the Irrawaddy River valley, as they should be), like I also believe that the world's living avifauna numbers at least 30,000 reproductively and geographically isolated species, and not the 9,000 or so as currently believed, will be given for your information. Later, I will begin by writing briefly, but synoptically, on the ecology and ecosystems of our bird species, concentrating chiefly on their nidification (nesting) and their food preferences. This will be 'rounded off' by an overview of the part played by post-independence amateur bird watchers here, highlighting what can still be accomplished by serious bird watchers, in partnership with trained and scholarly professionals, both here and abroad. By the end of 2002, I will hope to have 'fed' you all with the basics of these highly fundamental subjects which hopefully will make you cognizant of more than you knew and well prepared to 'evolve' into more reliable and tutored bird watchers who will be able to help us add/modify data on our vast subcontinent's rich avifauna.

All of us need to work in unison now. The "Panel of Exploring Conductors" (PECs) which I am now forming who will help guide and assist the screened and selected "Mixed Hunting Parties" (MHPs) of amateurs/professionals who may volunteer (like A.O. Hume's "correspondents") to join us in this critical documentation and re-search activity that I am working on and involved with. My goal, with the focused cooperation of the PECs and MHPs I am able to motivate and help perform, is to write / compile the third edition of THE FAUNA OF INDIA AND NEIGHBOURING AREAS, to follow the two FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA editions (1889-1898 & 1922-1930) which have not been updated in a scientific, comprehensive manner so far. The lengthy quotations reproduced above summarize the gradual build-up of our bird databases from the earliest years of substantive activity in our sub-continent (chiefly by Franklin, Sykes, Tickell, Hodgson, Blyth and Jerdon) to the unfortunate adoption of trinomial nomenclature by Stuart Baker, some hundred years later, when Ticehurst, Whistler, Kinnear and others were documenting fresh data and also analyzing what was already known, simultaneously. Ticehurst's 3-part critical "notes" on Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA volumes (1926-1927 & 1930, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 31: 490-499, 32: 344-356, 34: 468-490) are a model of scholarship, hardly emulated since by any post-independence ornithologist, although Abdulali, and partly Biswas and Ripley, came close.

The INDIAN HANDBOOK and succeeding regional avifaunas or "guide books" have taken us away from serious science into popular science and from complete, well analysed, scholarly databases to brief, inerudite, callous synopses and uninstructed, selective, eclectic summaries of what is a hugely growing pool of knowledge that can hardly be encapsulated like is now being attempted, mainly by foreign bird watchers who lack sufficient experience and 'intuition' of this subcontinent's bird diversity, if not of its overall biological 'character' as well. But no one in our countries has done anything that comes close, or is capable, so we must gratefully use these "guides" for want of anything better updated—the colour paintings, especially in the SUBCONTINENT GUIDE of Grimmett & the Inskipp are superior to anything I have seen from the time G.M. Henry's equally accurate and life-like ones opened my eyes to birds some 45 years ago, courtesy late M. Krishnan. Now, only a 20-volume (20,000+ page) third edition of the FAUNA series can justifiably inform and educate readers, of scholarship

or of amateur enthusiasm, of what is really known and documented about our immensely diverse bird taxa today. May I therefore expect the interest and confidence of whoever among you (and others you inform/encourage) feel it important to contribute, so we could then jointly bring forth a voluminous treatise, based on all known literature (including unpublished manuscripts and notes) and museum specimen databases, besides on freshly carried out targeted field surveys, plus critical scholarly researches on the species types and other material already sampled, or freshly trapped and released, on the avifauna of our huge, antaeon, behemothic and elephantine sub-continent, and its adjacent areas?

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Padmanabhan, P. & Yom-Tov, Y. (2000): Breeding season and clutch size of Indian passerines. *Ibis* 142: 75-81.

Temperate regions are characterised by strong seasonal changes in climate (especially in temperature). This environmental seasonality has a dramatic influence on the birds that live there. Reproduction, molt, and migration are among the aspects of the biology of birds that are affected by this seasonality. In contrast, tropical regions have traditionally been viewed as havens of stability, with temperature and resources being relatively constant year-round. Most of the peninsular Indian clearly does not follow this idealised tropical model. We have a strongly seasonal climate too – but the seasonality is produced more by variation in precipitation than in temperature. Given this, one would expect Indian birds to show distinct seasonality in behaviour corresponding with rainfall. Pramod Padmanabhan, from the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, and Yoram Yom-Tov, visiting from Tel Aviv University in Israel, tested this hypothesis using data collected from that venerable reference, Ali and Ripley's *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan*.

If the seasonal monsoon rains bring with them an abundance of food for birds (in the form of insects, rodents, and other birds), then birds should time their breeding such that the peak demand for food occurs during peak food availability. A bird's greatest food requirement presumably occurs when it has babies – either hungry, screaming nestlings, or ravenous fledglings that follow their parents around begging incessantly. So one would predict that most birds should start laying eggs before the monsoon begins – the exact time will depend on how long the incubation and nestling periods last. Padmanabhan and Yom-Tov collected data on the breeding season, body mass, and clutch size of passerines (the so-called 'song birds', Order Passeriformes, comprising about half of all Indian species) from the *Handbook*, treating each subspecies as a separate taxonomic group. They also divided the Indian subcontinent into 10 biogeographical subregions, to investigate geographical differences.

They found that, in general, peak breeding months are May-June, when 81-86% of passerines breed (see Figure 1 for Deccan plateau data). Lowest breeding occurs in December and January. In eight of the 10 subregions, peak breeding occurs about a month before the monsoon; this is what one would expect, because most passerines have incubation plus nestlings periods of roughly one month. The trans-Himalayan subregion is one of the two exceptions; here, temperature probably outweighs precipitation. The other exception is Sri Lanka, where peak breeding coincides with the onset of the southwestern monsoon. Rainfall is considerably less seasonal on this tropical island, and breeding is more extended here than on the continent. Larger passerines (chiefly crows and their relatives) start to breed earlier than smaller birds, which is again what one would expect because larger birds have longer incubation and nestling periods. On the whole, it appears that precipitation plays a key role in determining the breeding seasonality of birds in Indian subcontinent. This may not be a revolutionary conclusion, but it is always important to test one's conjectures using hard data.

The *Handbook* is certainly a valuable resource, but there is still much to learn about breeding seasonality of Indian birds. Much of the information we have is still qualitative: periodic and systematic censuses of nests are needed to examine breeding seasonality in detail. And the assumption that food for birds peaks with the start of the monsoon remains to be tested. Amateur birders can contribute not only to the first, but with a little application also to the second of these goals.

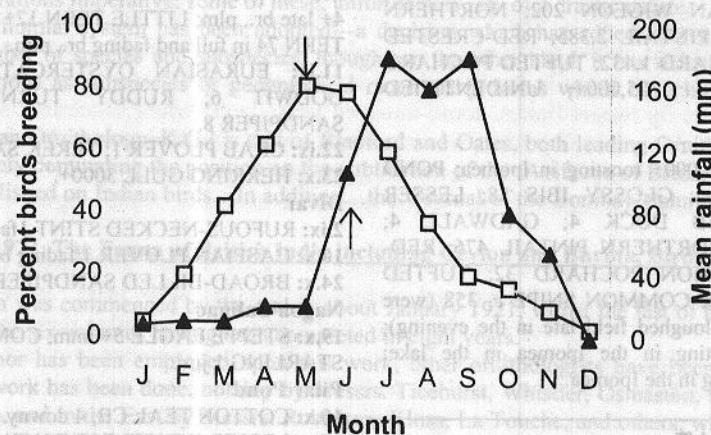


Figure 1. Seasonality in the Deccan plateau subregion. Open squares indicate the percentage of birds breeding in a given month. Solid triangles denote mean monthly rainfall. The downward arrow indicates peak breeding, and the upward arrow the onset of the monsoon.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follows Manakadan & Pittie (2001): Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Buceros* 6(1): i-ix, 1-38. Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH**GUNTUR DISTRICT****Uppalapadu 4.xii (KMR)**

SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 220 CB, 79 N; LITTLE CORMORANT 250; PAINTED STORK NT* 26, CB 1 N; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 1400 CB; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 600, CB; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 1.

MEDAK DISTRICT**16.xii (RM, JVDM)**

(8km before Medak town on the Medak-Narsapur road)

GREY-NECKED BUNTING 30+; BLACK-HEADED BUNTING 15; RED-HEADED BUNTING 200+.

Pocharam Tank

ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 239; EUROPEAN WHITE STORK 7; GLOSSY IBIS 57; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 5; BLACK IBIS 5; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 4; GREATER FLAMINGO 3; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 538; UNIDENTIFIED DUCK 10,000+ arr., after sundown; RIVER TERN 116; BLACK-BELLIED TERN NT* 23.

Rayanpally Tank

GLOSSY IBIS 8; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 12; BLACK IBIS 6.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT**28-30.xii (RM, SAK)****Ibrahimpur Tank**

LITTLE CORMORANT 830; LESSER WHISTLING-DUCK 1,824; COMB DUCK 21; GADWALL 37; NORTHERN SHOVELLER 236; NORTHERN PINTAIL 1,576; RED-CRESTED POCHARD 15; COMMON POCHARD 358; TUFTED POCHARD 1,239; UNIDENTIFIED DUCK c. 15,000+.

Kotpally Tank

BAR-HEADED GOOSE 231; GADWALL 18; NORTHERN PINTAIL 1,256; GARGANEY 136; COMMON TEAL 239; COMMON POCHARD 658; FERRUGINOUS POCHARD NT* 2; TUFTED POCHARD 895.

Laknapur Tank

LITTLE CORMORANT 685; GLOSSY IBIS 58; COMB DUCK 22; COTTON TEAL 485; EURASIAN WIGEON 202; NORTHERN SHOVELLER 962; NORTHERN PINTAIL 2,385; RED-CRESTED POCHARD 168; COMMON POCHARD 1,432; TUFTED POCHARD 1,852; UNIDENTIFIED DUCK c. 25,000+; UNIDENTIFIED WADERS in clouds.

Mittekoduru Tank

EGRETS (mixed species flocks) 25,000+ roosting in Ipomea; POND HERON 500+ roosting in Ipomea; GLOSSY IBIS 58; LESSER WHISTLING-DUCK 878; COMB DUCK 4; GADWALL 4; NORTHERN SHOVELLER 62; NORTHERN PINTAIL 476; RED-CRESTED POCHARD 6; COMMON POCHARD 32; TUFTED POCHARD 52; PINTAIL SNIPE & COMMON SNIPE c. 358 (were coming into 5 acres of a freshly ploughed field late in the evening); ROSY STARLING 25,000+ roosting in the Ipomea in the lake; COMMON MYNA 10,000+ roosting in the Ipomea.

DELHI**Delhi Canal (Bawana-Daryapur stretch)**

7.xii (SCS): BLACKNECKED STORK NT* 1 pair in a ploughed field; BLACK IBIS 27 on an Eucalyptus tree; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE

VU* 1+1 ad; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+3 (including 1 juvenile) +1+2+2+3+2 in surrounding fields.

Jor Bagh

16.xii (AA): INDIAN WHITEBACKED VULTURE CR* PRB, 1 ad, fetching stick to a N under const., 4m up a Silver Oak tree.

Okhla and surrounding areas

2.xii (ND; others): GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 3 ad.

17.xii (KBB; SV): YELLOWLEGGED GULL 1.

GOA**NORTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)****Anjuna Seabird Watch**

23.ix: JOUANIN'S PETREL 407+ migrating N, 2-9km offshore; GARGANEY 11 migrating S, 2km offshore; ROSEATE TERN 939+ migrating S between 7-12am.

24.ix: Terns migrating S between 8-10.30am: ROSEATE TERN 1992+; WHITE-CHEEKED TERN 105+; BRIDLED TERN 1524+.

25.ix: PERSIAN SHEARWATER sub-species *persicus*, 1 c. 250m offshore.

Arpora Valley

27.x: CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE POB, N for last 7 years re-used & extended every season & birds showing every sign of br., behaviour; BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 1 M.

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary 6-8.xi

CRESTED GOSHAWK 1; ORIENTAL SCOPS-OWL 3 hrd; BROWN FISH-OWL 1; BROWN WOOD-OWL 2 hrd; CEYLON FROGMOUTH 1 hrd; WHITE-RUMPED NEEDLETAIL-SWIFT 1+; BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER 1; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 1; BROWN-BREASTED FLYCATCHER 1; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 1; WHITE-BELLIED BLUE-FLYCATCHER 1 pair; WESTERN CROWNED WARBLER several; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER 1.

Chapora Estuary

26.viii: GREAT KNOT 1 juv.

4.ix: GULL-BILLED TERN 8+ non-br., plm; CASPIAN TERN 6; LARGE CRESTED TERN 33 ad., non-br., plm., 20 1st summer plm; LESSER CRESTED TERN 63+ non-br., plm; SANDWICH TERN 7+ non-br., plm; ROSEATE TERN 9+ fading br., plm; COMMON TERN 4+ late br., plm; LITTLE TERN 12+ non-br., plm; WHITE-CHEEKED TERN 74 in full and fading br., plm.

11.ix: EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER 5 imm; BAR-TAILED GODWIT 6; RUDDY TURNSTONE 1; BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER 8.

22.ix: CRAB PLOVER 1; TEREK SANDPIPER 17.

23.x: HERRING GULL 3000+.

Divar

2.ix: RUFOUS-NECKED STINT 1 fading br., plm.

10.x: CASPIAN PLOVER 1 fading br., plm; RICHARD'S PIPIT 1.

24.x: BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER 34; EUROPEAN ROLLER 1.

Nagoa-Saligao

19.x: STEPPE EAGLE 5+ imm; COMMON CUCKOO 2; BRAHMIN STARLING 1 juv.

Pilar Pond

10.x: COTTON TEAL CB, 4 downy chicks.

15.x: LESSER WHISTLING-DUCK CB, 7 fledglings.

Suria Ghat

15-16.ix: INDIAN RUFOUS BABBLER C; CRIMSON SUNBIRD 1 M.

SCUTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)**Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary**

2-4.x: BESRA SPARROWHAWK 1 M; PACIFIC SWIFT 5+.

HARYANA**GURGAON DISTRICT****Basai Wetland**

9.xii (BH; ND; Others): PAINTED STORK NT* 5; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 15; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 350; WHITE-TAILED LAPWING 50+.

15.xii (BH; ND; Others): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 pair; BRAHMINY SHELDUCK 46; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; RED-HEADED FALCON 1 pair; WHITE-TAILED LAPWING 50+; NORTHERN LAPWING 18; SAND MARTIN c. 50.

19.xii (BG; BH; KK): SARUS CRANE VU* 1 hrd.

Sultanpur National Park

8.xii (BH; SC; Others): GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1 ad; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT**Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary**

8.xii (AS; HS; SCS; SM; SS): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; GREYLAG GOOSE c. 400; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 400; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair.

24.xii (HSS; MC; SCS; SM; T): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 pair; GREYLAG GOOSE c. 600; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 200; LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD 2 ad; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 1 ad; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA 1 ad (uncommon).

SONIPAT DISTRICT**Delhi Canal (Rohat-Harsana Minor stretch)**

22.xii (SM; SCS): GREAT CORMORANT c. 400 roosting on Eucalyptus trees; SARUS CRANE VU* 3+2+2+1 in wheat fields.

Drain Number Eight

17.xii (SM; SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 20 scattered over ploughed fields; PAINTED STORK NT* 13+12+3 in flight; SHORT-TOED SNAKE-EAGLE 2 OH.

Gurgaon Canal (Kakroi-Jharoti stretch)2.xii (SCS): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 3; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 12; BLACK IBIS 18+2+3+9; SARUS CRANE VU* 7+2+2; BLACK-HEADED MUNIA (Chestnut-bellied race, *Lonchura malacca rubroniger*) 2.

6.xii (SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 2+3 (inc., 1 juv.); SIND SPARROW 6.

JLN Feeder Canal/Drain Number Eight (Rithal/Gohana)

13.xii (SCS): PLUMBEIOUS REDSTART 1 F; WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART 1 ad (first record for the Delhi region).

16.xii (SM; SCS): GREAT CORMORANT c. 500 roosting on Eucalyptus trees; PAINTED STORK NT* 16 OH; SPOTTED OWLET being mobbed & chased by 1 GREY-HEADED FLYCATCHER & 4 HUME'S WARBLERS; PLUMBEIOUS REDSTART; WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART.

23.xii (MC; SCS; T): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; BRAHMINY KITE 1+2 (uncommon); PLUMBEIOUS REDSTART; WHITECAPPED REDSTART.

25.xii (HSS; RS; SCS; SM): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 26; COMB DUCK 28; BOOTED EAGLE 1 in dark phase; PLUMBEIOUS REDSTART; WHITECAPPED REDSTART.

Mohamedabad Marshes

15.xii (SM; SCS): PAINTED STORK NT* 15 OH; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 8; COMB DUCK 37; FERRUGINOUS POCHARD 20; RUFF 1000+.

23.xii (MC; SCS; T): SARUS CRANE VU* 2+1+4+2+2; SIND SPARROW 32 in Bbabul and tall grasses.

Rohat Pond

6.xii (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT* 5; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 9; SARUS CRANE VU* 2.

22.xii (SM; SCS): OSPREY 1.

TAMIL NADU**CHENNAI DISTRICT****Chennai 21.iv-16.v (VR)**

BLACK-WINGED STILT; BLACK-TAILED GODWIT 10; LITTLE STINT in br., plm; GULL-BILLED TERN 50+; GOLDEN ORIOLE.

DINDIGUL ANNA DISTRICT**Kodaikanal 3-10.v (VR)**

BOOTED EAGLE; INDIAN EDIBLE-NEST SWIFTLET; WHITE-RUMPED NEEDLETAIL-SWIFT; BROWN-BACKED NEEDLETAIL-SWIFT; ALPINE SWIFT; HOPOE; HOUSE SWALLOW; WHITE-BELLIED SHORTWING VU*; GREY-BREASTED LAUGHINGTHRUSH NT* C in undergrowth near sholas; BLACK-AND-ORANGE FLYCATCHER VU*; NILGIRI FLYCATCHER NT*.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tik-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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EDITORS' COMMENT: 'Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, though now split into *L. heuglini* & *L. cachinnans*, is taken as *argentatus* here.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST**Demoiselle Cranes of Kheechan**

"The first presence of Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* reported at Kheechan is of 94 birds in 1988 (Pitta # 127, November 2001, p. 2). I happen to have sighted them there in October/November 1983. My guesstimate was that they number into four digits. I had promptly informed the Bombay Natural History Society (Mr J.C. Daniel) and requested them to survey and evaluate this large congregation. But no one could be spared because of their pre-occupation with the preparations for their Centenary celebrations.

"A brief recall of my experience might interest the readers of *Pitta*. I was out to reconnoiter an area for field manoeuvres by an army corps astride the Jodhpur-Barmer road. It is not uncommon to find an amphitheatre in the desert formed at the junction of several sand dunes. The sand ridges may be up to a hundred feet higher than the circular floor of the amphitheatre and thus sheltered from the elements, the floor may have sparse cultivation or else a rich outcrop of the desert flora. It is usually also a haven for the desert fauna. That was the natural setting where on a clear, sunny mid-noon I stumbled (literally) on a congregation of Demoiselle Cranes so vast that from about a thousand meters I could not gather them all in my vision without panning my head from one end to the other. I could not restrain the impulse to walk into the middle of this black and grey shimmering mass splattered over the golden yellow desert sand. Regretably the Demoiselles did not brook intrusion closer than about fifty meters. In a few minutes in batches of 20-30 the whole congregation rose on wings circling and trumpeting as they gained height and the collective echo created a booming effect in the silence of the desert.

"It surprises me why the Indian Bird Conservation Network has not given the Important Bird Area status (Category IV – congregations) to Kheechan? And why Kheechan is not on the itinerary of most bird watchers locally and internationally? For where else can one see more than one thousand Demoiselle Cranes of a morning in January/February come to feed on a space no bigger than the centre courts at Wimbledon? It may be the greatest Demoiselle show in India (?), perhaps in the world!"

—Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh, Chandigarh.

Maj. General Hardwicke & Amateur Birdwatchers

"As always, I find Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's writing (*Pitta*, 128 December 2001) interesting and stimulating. To the best of my knowledge there are no biographies of Indian Naturalists. I wish Dr Ghorpadé would write Humayun Abdulali's; at least a monograph.

"The quotations preceding the text of Dr Ghorpadé's article are most engrossing. I want to respond firstly to Richard E. Blackwelder's belief that 'Many of the most prolific taxonomists have started out in such prosaic jobs as locomotive factory worker...or officer in the Army.' How true this observation is. Where the Indian Army is concerned, I am sure readers of *Pitta* are familiar with the names of Maj. T.C. Jerdon and Col. Tickell as birdmen, Col. Swinhoe and Brig. Evans as Lepidopterists, Col. R.S.P. Bates, the first bird photographer of India, to mention just a few. But what the readers may not know is that there was an outstanding Army Officer who preceded them all and he may well be the first recorded Naturalist of India.

"Thomas Hardwicke arrived at Fort William, Calcutta in 1778 at age twenty as an Artillery Cadet in the Bengal Presidency Army. By 1818 he rose to be a Maj. General at the head of this Corps. So there can be little doubt of his professional merit. But he is remembered more for the fact that in his 44 years of military service and stay in India he amassed a vast collection of Indian Natural History specimens which may have been the first display from India in the British Museum, London. He employed the best artists of India to sketch and paint Indian birds and mammals and in 1830-34 the British Museum published 366 paintings from Hardwicke's collection in 32 folios under the title *Illustrations of Indian Zoology*.

"I believe Maj. General Hardwicke would figure first in the Hall of Fame of Indian Natural History.

"Allow me to also respond to Gerald and Lee Durrell's view, 'Never be ashamed to use the words 'I don't know'.' Now, there is an Indian Army unit with more than 200 years proud record of gallantry on battlefields in Europe, Africa, Persia, Burma and on Indian soil. This Army outfit is on record to advise its officers *never* to say 'I don't know'! An officer on joining the unit was told by the commanding officer that (a) 'we finish our own Tigers always'; meaning that any task once undertaken must be pursued to its logical conclusion no matter what the consequences and (b) 'we never say, I don't know'; rather, 'I will find out and let you know, Sir' and (c) when two gentlemen officers take on a wager only one verifies and the other accepts the gentleman's word in honour-bound. Little wonder that such focussed outfits are often also the seeding ground for amateurs ('one who cultivates a particular study or art for the love of it,' Cambridge Dictionary) in disciplines well outside their chosen professional beat."

—Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh, Chandigarh.

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

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2002

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 130: February 2002

PROGRAMME

Indexed 25/3/2002

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 3-iii-2002: ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru, Medak District: Members proceeding directly are requested to reach the destination by 7.30am and assemble at the main gate. Transportation within the campus will be arranged. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads (Ameerpet road) at 6.45am. Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

NOTES & NEWS

Ring recoveries

In December 1999 and January 2000, R. Suresh Kumar recovered two rings of Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* from Arunachal Pradesh, India. The rings were collected from local people who had killed the birds for food. Another ring was recovered from West Bengal in April 2000 by a researcher from the Bombay Natural History Society. All the ringed birds were from Quinghai Hu Lake in China and were ringed by the National Bird Banding Center in June 1999. The ringing locality is approximately 1200kms (straight line distance) from the recovery sites. [R. Suresh Kumar <sureshk_73@hotmail.com> on <orientalbirding@yahooogroups.com>, 10.i.2002.]

Bird book in Marathi

This is to announce the publication of the long awaited *Pakshikosh* by Maruti Chitampalli. This Marathi book, describing the birds found in Maharashtra, will be published in March 2002 by Sahitya Prasar Kendra of Nagpur. Priced at Rs. 800/- a pre-publication price (before 15 Feb.2001) of Rs. 550/- is being offered. The book has 410 pages, 128 colour photos and 300+ illustrations and maps. The book has prologue (80 pp.) by the author and gives bird names from various Indian languages (of all adjoining states and from the Sanskrit), various tribal names apart from common English and Scientific names. This seems to be the unique feature of the book. Those interested in booking a copy at the pre-publication price, can do so by sending a MO / DD for Rs. 580/- (incl. postage) to Sahitya Prasar Kendra, Opp. Patwardhan High School, Sitabardi, Nagpur 440012. Phone: 0712-523702. We must all congratulate Maruti Chitampalli for this tremendous effort. [Ulhas Rane, Moderator, Maharashtra Pakshimitra, <ulhas@eth.net> on <birdsofbombay@yahooogroups.com>, 9.ii.2002.]

Ali & Ripley's Handbook in paperback edition

Oxford University Press, Delhi, have recently (2001) published the entire 2nd edition of the *Handbook of the Birds*

of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley, in a 10 volume, paperback edition. Originally published between 1968-1974, a 2nd edition was brought out between 1978-1998. This new set has an attractive colour painting on the cover of each volume, but alas no artist is credited! The accompanying plates are the same as in the authors' *Pictorial Guide*, by John Henry Dick. The set has its own slip-case and is priced at Rs. 4,250/-. BNHS members get a discount of 15% and most booksellers are generally willing to part with a 10% discount.

World Bank plan: cranes create flutter

Sonu Jain in the *Indian Express*

ETAWAH, JANUARY 21: A \$ 286-million World Bank project which aims to convert 15,000 hectares of saline wasteland into agricultural land in Uttar Pradesh might just have to do a mid-course correction. The project, first commissioned in 1998, is reportedly endangering the world's densest Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* habitat in the wetlands of Etawah and Mainpuri. The project, which could benefit upto 5,500 farmers, involves spraying gypsum in the fields, flooding it with water, letting it leach and then draining it through canals. It is these canals which pass through the wetlands that are proving to be the bone of contention. When informed about the impact the canals were having, the District Magistrates of the two districts issued orders to stop draining the wetlands.

"I did a survey and found that we were not directly damaging the wetlands. But there is a possibility that the wetlands are being drained out by our canals, so we are conducting an inquiry into the issue," said Chandrashekhar, MD of Bhumi Dudhar Nigam, which is implementing the project. However, World Bank representative in New Delhi P. Siddhu told *Indian Express*, "Our project is scientific and is not likely to drain the wetlands." ...Continued on page 4.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-49

"Ever since Stresemann's *Entwicklung der Ornithologie* was published in 1951 there have been demands for an English edition of this exciting volume. The merits of such a proposal are obvious. Ornithology, perhaps more than any other branch of zoology, resembles botany in its broad popular appeal. Yet in spite of the large number of volumes we have on the botany of every period from the Greeks to the present, there was nothing like it for ornithology prior to the appearance of Stresemann's volume. The fact that the author was perhaps the outstanding ornithologist of his era gives the volume great authority. But Stresemann was more than a specialist. He was a scholar of extraordinary breadth and erudition. Like a historian in the best sense of the word he understood how to capture the *Zeitgeist* of every period, the coming and going of fashions, the impact of other sciences and of contemporary conceptualizations, and, not least, he was fascinated by the personalities of the leading figures in the development of ornithology. This permitted him to escape the danger of a dry factual account and enabled him to present a thoroughly readable, indeed altogether fascinating, story. He made his intent quite clear by using (in the German title) the word *Entwicklung* ("development") rather than *Geschichte* ("history").

There are two reasons why a history of ornithology is of importance far beyond the boundaries of that field. Because birds are so accessible for study and research, ornithologists again and again have become leaders in certain new branches of biology. In zoogeography, in the theories of evolution, in the theory of geographic speciation, in environmental physiology, in population biology, in endocrinology, in the study of behavior (ethology), and in many other areas of biology some of the most important pioneering achievements were made by ornithologists. Indeed, no history of these disciplines can be written without a careful analysis of the input from ornithology. But there is a second reason for the importance of a historical treatment of ornithology. This is the excessive emphasis in recent histories of modern biology on experimental researches or, to put it negatively, the extraordinary neglect of the contributions made by all those branches of biology that might be conveniently bracketed under the name of natural history. There is no history of biology in which we can find a truly adequate presentation of the maturation of the species concept, of the study of geographic variation, of the theory of systematics (from the viewpoint of the zoologist), of animal ecology and ethology, and of the many other areas to which ornithology had made such significant contributions. Even those who are not in the slightest interested in ornithology will find Stresemann's accounts of these subjects fascinating and invaluable."

[Ernst Mayr's "Foreword" *In*: Erwin Stresemann, 1975, "*Ornithology. From Aristotle to the Present*". xii+432 pp. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A., and London, England, pp. ix-x.]

"In 1884 a spark flew over the ocean and kindled a fire in Europe; immediately a general alarm was sounded to preserve the venerable structure of Linnaean nomenclature and, if possible, to smother the conflagration entirely.

In that year Elliot Coues arrived in England as a representative of the American Ornithologists' Union, to awaken interest in the idea of trinomialism and the new American rules for its use. He was warmly received. On Sharpe's recommendation William Flower arranged a meeting of England's leading zoologists in the lecture room of the new Natural History Museum in South Kensington on July 1, at which Coues spoke. But the only person present who sponsored the adoption of the American practice was Seebohm, "with an extraordinary display of acute logic and brilliant dialectic." It was useless, for he did not succeed in dispelling the doubts of the meeting."

"On May 12, 1890, the full assembly [of the Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft—K.G.], "after hours of often very lively debate, which permitted hardly any hope of a successful resolution of the difficult problem," achieved a compromise and assigned the drafting of it to a five-man committee...It read in part:

The trinomial nomenclature of subspecies may be permitted in certain instances to facilitate study...Whenever a third name is allowed, it will, for practical reasons, permit the particular characterization of those local forms which, because of variations in living requirements, differ very slightly but constantly from others, and whose separation as a species either appears unjustified or would not be acceptable to all authors. We shall thus avoid burdening the system unnecessarily with binomially named species that are difficult to identify precisely, though as a rule binomial description is completely sufficient.

This was hardly a scientific definition of subspecies. The practicing ornithologists...had won...Only one man held out, the secretary of the meeting, Ernst Hartert. Influenced by Seebohm's writings, he had defined subspecies (in his *Katalog der Vogelsammlung im Museum der Senckenbergischen Naturforschenden Gesellschaft*, which has been published a few months earlier) as "forms not sufficiently distant from others to entitle them to the rank of species." And among the guests one was shaking his head, though for quite different reasons, ready to call attention to the danger of an outbreak of frivolous names given by scribblers who were only eager to publish and had no critical judgement, if a general introduction of trinomialism took place. This was Richard Bowdler Sharpe, Europe's most experienced ornithologist, who had followed Hartert's advice and stopped in Frankfurt for the meeting, on his way to Budapest for the Second International Ornithological Congress. Now he sat there in tense excitement and damned all the modernistic troublemakers surrounding him.

Sharpe, one of the most tireless workers ever known in the development of ornithology, was then at the height of his powers, after a rapid rise to fame. Born in London on November 22, 1847, he had as a boy annoyed his father, the publisher of a small newspaper, by neglecting to follow in his footsteps, preferring to watch animals in the woods and fields, and to add to the collection of birds that he stuffed himself. To cure him of this fad, his father took him out of grammar school when he was 15 and apprenticed him to a London publishing house. But there was no cooling the boy's enthusiasm for birds. Just after changing masters and starting to work for the well-known book dealer Bernard Quaritch in 1866, he began to visit the British Museum in Bloomsbury in his occasional spare time. There he studied kingfishers and consulted books on birds, because he had conceived the idea of a monograph on the Alcedinidae! These activities soon attracted the attention of several visitors to the bird room. Among them was Dr. P.L. Sclater, who in 1867 helped the industrious young man to a job as library assistant to the Zoological Society. Now his fortune was made. Constantly surrounded by all the books that he needed, he worked away feverishly at his kingfisher monograph. In doing so he came to know the most important ornithologists in England, and was so encouraged by their praise that he went to Leiden the same year, to improve his specialised knowledge by studying with Schlegel. Here he made the acquaintance of the bird painter Keulemans, and succeeded in acquiring his masterly talent to illustrate the monograph. The very first parts, published by the author in 1868, made a great stir...George Robert Gray, in charge of the British Museum's bird collection since 1831, died on May 6, 1872, and Sharpe, on the recommendation of the keeper of the Zoological Department, Dr. Albert Günther, was chosen to succeed him. He was only 24 when he realized his most audacious dream.

His predecessor, a dry, pedantic civil servant, had not known how (and indeed had not even tried) to make the crowded bird collections in the cellars of the old museum in Bloomsbury into a center of ornithological research. Those not forced to go there avoided it and consulted the private collections, which in England were steadily increasing in number and splendor. The whole situation changed overnight. Sharpe, helped by the goodwill and trust of many reputable ornithologists, rearranged the birds completely and made the vaults as attractive as possible. He did not have to wait long for results. In 1873 he acquired A.R. Wallace's famous collection from the Malay Archipelago, and then in rapid succession one donor followed another in entrusting his treasures to Sharpe's care. He had taken over in 1872 at most 30,000 birds (of which 10,000 were mounted and on exhibition), but by 1890 he had no fewer than 230,000. Though at the beginning of his era the British Museum's bird collection ranked level with or behind those of the Berlin and Paris Museums, its rapid development left all competition hopelessly far behind. The most imposing contribution

occurred in 1885, when Allan O. Hume presented to the British Museum his famous Indian birds, at that time the largest private collection in the world, on condition that Sharpe should fetch it personally from India. It contained 60,000 skins and 16,000 eggs.

Merely the cataloguing, arranging, and checking of the innumerable acquisitions from all over the world would have completely swamped the powers of a normally competent person. Sharpe, however, made a thorough job of all that and much more besides. Certainly it was not simply his daemon that drove him to pile burden upon burden; it was also the anxiety about providing for the ten lively daughters with whom he had been blessed after his marriage at the age of 19. For their sake he completed the magnificent books that the elderly Gould had left unfinished, *The Birds of Asia* (1850-1883), *The Birds of New Guinea* (1875-1888)... And all this could only be done in the evenings at home!

But Sharpe's really gigantic performance was his work on the *Catalogue of the Birds of the British Museum* (27 volumes, 1874-1898). Soon after he had entered his new position he had decided on an undertaking... which would include all the birds of the world, with citations of all synonyms and literature, exact descriptions of plumage, and complete details of distribution. He began with diurnal birds of prey, and had the manuscript of the first volume ready on June 1, 1874. In 1875 the second followed, on owls, and by 1890 Sharpe had written eleven volumes with his own hand. What that meant he described himself at that time:

By working very hard for 300 out of 365 days in a year, and by burning much midnight oil, it is just possible to describe and to work out the synonymy of one species a day — not more. That is the average which a man can attain to by very close application; and if he can describe and collect together the synonymy of 300 species every year, it will be good work indeed... This is the result of my calculations — that a man can hope to acquire some practical knowledge of species and their literature by unswerving application to work for forty years!"

"Hartert had become Sharpe's friend from the first moment of looking into his merry eyes. Sharpe was not at all like the "authorities" from Berlin, Brunswick, or Dresden, who were very conscious of their own dignity and emphasized it with every gesture. The "immense and almost boyish enthusiasm" commented on by a biographer had not been dampened in the slightest by age and honors. He went to work with cheerful humor, and whenever this seemed to desert him, his beloved red wine helped its recall. Although he was always ready to admire someone else's real achievements without a trace of envy, and to honor the efforts of a scientific opponent, he kept a watchful eye on the failings of his fellowmen and knew how to depict them in an inexhaustible flow of anecdotes, to everyone's delight. But there were many and varied anecdotes about him, too. His temperament was illustrated by the story of his having furiously seized an inkwell, like a second Martin Luther, and thrown it at a negligent assistant who had not been quick enough in bringing the book he wanted. The assistant ducked only just in time, letting the missile smash on the wall of the bird room. "But Mr. Sharpe!" was all he could say as he slowly got up off the floor, streaming with ink, whereupon Sharpe rushed over to him and hugged him warmly to his broad chest.

That was the sort of man he was, and the sort he would have had to be to win complete affection from Hartert, whose own warm heart and gay humor were always looking for a response. Lucid intelligence alone, which he himself possessed abundantly, was never enough for him in other people; he demanded "real men."

[Erwin Stresemann, 1975, "Ornithology. From Aristotle to the Present". pp. 250-254, 256-257.]

Quixotic perhaps, but certainly by no means chaotic, are my well thought out plans to further the consolidation and dissemination of knowledge about the birds of this sub-continent and their lives. As promised in last month's Letter # 48 I will now take readers through a selected and anecdotal history of researches and amateur enterprise directed at our avifaunal wealth and diversity. This history will especially reveal to you the evolution of the confused species-limit judgements that have been the bane of a clear understanding of the real identities of what are close to 2,000 good species of birds that fly around or flap about in India and neighbouring countries, which make up the Indian sub-region of the Oriental biogeographical region. This latter extends from the mountains of the Hindu Kush—Karakorum through the Indian and Indo-Chinese peninsulas, south of the great Himalayan Ranges and the mighty Yangtze-Kiang River, and across the Malay Archipelago to New Guinea and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. Political landmarks are now blasé and of no interest to me except for pinpointing the exact locations of bird sightings which can also be achieved by using the lines of latitude and longitude, if necessary. It is biogeography that will help us understand the habitat preferences of selective bird species, together with the floral ("vegetation") types they choose. The current laughable and wasteful (time value wise) studies of the avifaunas of Cities (wholly disturbed and artificial habitats), Districts, States, and Countries contribute nothing to the understanding of wild bird diversity, which are still thriving in officially "protected areas" or in wildernesses which are away from the haunts of a rapidly urbanising human species.

I will not bore the reader by repeating documented histories of bird watching activities in our sub-continent. A quick listing of what is available for those who will take the trouble to search for, find and read these books and papers should suffice here. My inaugural paper on "The Status of Insect diversity in the Indian sub-continent. Introduction and Overview part One" (1997, *Indian J. Biodiversity*, 1: 49-89) includes almost 200 references and summarizes the entomological researches carried out in India and adjacent countries. Subba Rao gave a fairly exhaustive account of the "History of Entomology in India" (1998, xvi+168 pp., 74 pls) in his recent book. Burkill (1953-1963, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 57: 846 to 60: 370) wrote excellent "Chapters on the History of Botany in India." Santapau (1958) documented the "History of Botanical researches in India, Burma and Ceylon", and Desmond (1992) elaborated on "The European discovery of the Indian Flora" in his illustrated book. Our botanical bibliographies have been listed by, among others, Blatter (1910, *JBNHS* 20: lxxix-clxxxv), Santapau (1952, *JBNHS* 50: 520-548, 51: 205-259), Das (1976 & 1984, *JBNHS* 73: 98-120, 80: 507-516), and Ghorpadé (1997, *IJB* 1: 97-130). Publications of the Botanical Survey of India, including the Floras published so far, are further useful for a basic grounding on our plant life and their documentation, plus Mathew's guide to available literature on our Flora in his multi-volume "Flora of the Tamilnadu Carnatic" (1981, pp. 425-455, 1983; pp. 1973-1979; 1988, pp. 901-915).

A readily accessible but perhaps little-known article on the "History of our knowledge of the Indian Fauna through the Ages" by H. Srinivasa Rao (1957, *JBNHS* 54: 251-280, 2 pls) will educate you on what is known about the history of our zoological diversity, and the score of references appended lead you on further into more documented literature on the history of our animal life. The two plates by "The Ruler of Sandur" (my late uncle, Y.R. Ghorpade), and by late M. Krishnan (my first learned "Guru") show images of a mythical animal *Yali* with a leonine body and variously depicted faces. Besides the references that Srinivasa Rao cites, the latest update on the Fauna of India is by J.R.B. Alfred, A.K. Das & A.K. Sanyal (1998, "Faunal Diversity in India", viii+497 pp.), of the Zoological Survey of India, which updated the earlier Z.S.I. State of the Art reports on the "Animal resources of India, Protozoa to Mammalia", by T.N. Ananthakrishnan (1980) and later by M.S. Jairajpuri (1991). In this book, S.S. Saha wrote the chapter on "Faunal Distribution in India: Aves" (pp. 449-457).

In my last Letter # 48 I had quoted from the four pre-independence works that presented brief summaries of the ornithological "Periods" during the British Indian Empire. Other major historical accounts of our ornithology were given by Norman Kinnear (1952, *JBNHS* 50: 766-778, 51: 104-110), Sálím Ali & Ripley (1968, *INDIAN HANDBOOK* 1: xvii-xxiv, xlix-liv), Sálím Ali (1971, *Sci. & Cult.*, 37: 358-367; 1979, "Bird study in India: its history and its importance", 41 pp., Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Delhi; 1980, *Bull. British Ornithol. Club*, 100: 80-83), and by the "ENVIS Team" [1999, "The History of Indian Ornithology", *Buceros* 4(2), i+21 pp.]. But, a comprehensive

and historically accurate contribution is still sadly lacking. See also the references on the history of the Bombay Natural History Society that I cited in my Letter # 19 (Pitta 91, November 1998) which will give further information on this subject. Though the B.N.H.S. and many regional societies with a strong research interest in Ornithology, like the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, Sálím Ali Centre of Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, Madras Naturalists' Society, Madras, Birdwatchers' Field Club of India, Bangalore, and others are generally known to amateur birders, I may also inform them of the Zoological Survey of India's publications (1916-) and bird collections, and that of the M.S. University of Baroda's zoology department (Pavo, an Indian Journal of Ornithology, 1963-), which are also repositories of important databases on our avifauna. Besides the also little-known but tremendously important 11 (+ 1) volumes of Allan Hume's *Stray Feathers*, one other major source for early ornithological literature is the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1832-). Aasheesh Pittie has now produced a CD-Rom with the most inclusive Bibliography of Indian Ornithology (some 19,800+ titles) based on his original documentation, his earlier BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX (1995), and the Smithsonian Institution's ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (1994) which were either selective or limited in scope. I myself am working on annotated bibliographies of ornithological publications (besides others) in each of the several scientific journals, separately, which are either done or in preparation, like in the J.B.N.H.S., *Records of the Indian Museum*, *Records of the Zoological Survey of India* and its other publications, *Stray Feathers*, *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, *Pavo*, *Mayura*, *Pitta*, or also those still unresearched like in the *Indian Forester*, *Cheetal*, *Indian J. Forestry*, *J. Shivaji Univ.*, *Loris*, *Spolia Zeylanica*, *J. Animal Morph. & Physiol.*, *Sci. & Cult.*, *Curr. Sci.*, *Geobios*, etc. Several foreign journals and bulletins carrying databases about our sub-continent's Ornithology need also to be searched and indexed. Pittie's CD-Rom and a hopefully forthcoming hard copy in print can then be added to and made as accurate and complete as possible in the next few years for the benefit of users worldwide.

The quotations in this Letter given above are from a book I found in V.C. Ambedkar's (Sálím Ali's very first "official" student") library at his flat in Poona. Wonderful addition (as photocopied pages) to my literature collection, great reading and a "keyhole" to the ornithologists of long ago whom we tend to forget about and brand as "obsolete" or "outdated", which is a great pity for Science. I have quoted *in extenso* data on R.B. Sharpe, whose astounding contributions even I was blissfully unaware of. Highlighting the work of only one person in India and shutting our eyes and minds to the work of these innumerable "greats" whose toil and labour has gotten our Ornithology to where it is today—perhaps the best specialised branch of zoology with more documented information about its taxa than any other animal group can boast of—is unfortunate. But, species limits, the basic "building blocks" of natural science, are still hazy and poorly analysed even today! Much is still out there and also preserved in libraries and collections here and abroad, so, besides just rooting for the "conservation" of our biodiversity, we need also to greatly expand research on our still poorly known flora and fauna, with motivated amateurs (my MHPs) supplementing the skill of a few dedicated professionals available (my PECs).

[Errata: Letter # 49—First quotation on Page 2, the source in boldface should read "**Birds of India, Vol. 1, pp. xliii-xlv**]", last quotation on Page 4, Para 1, Line 3 should read "the Palearctic Avifauna"; Text Para 1, Line 6 should read "Sálím Ali & Ripley's INDIAN HANDBOOK", Para 2, Line 3 should read "sub-continent's biogeography" and its last line should read "sub-continent's rich avifauna."]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

...Continued from page 1.

But even before the DMs issued their orders, some of the wetlands had already disappeared, for instance, the Ambarpur wetland, which has 25 breeding pairs and a congregation of 400 sarus cranes, Kudaiyya, Sauj, Gadd and Sarsai Navar. "The sarus is not very good at adapting to climate changes. That is why it is important to protect their habitat," pointed out Gopi Sundar, senior researcher with the Wildlife Institute of India who has been studying the impact of land use change on the sarus. Bird experts from India and abroad have written to the World Bank, asking it to review the project. They include George Archibald, founder of the US-based International Crane Foundation, Steven Landfield, who has done pioneering work with cranes, and Asad Rahmani of the Bombay Natural History Society. The experts are not asking the project to be stopped; rather, they suggest that a few key wetlands in the area be demarcated and declared protected areas or as biospheres.

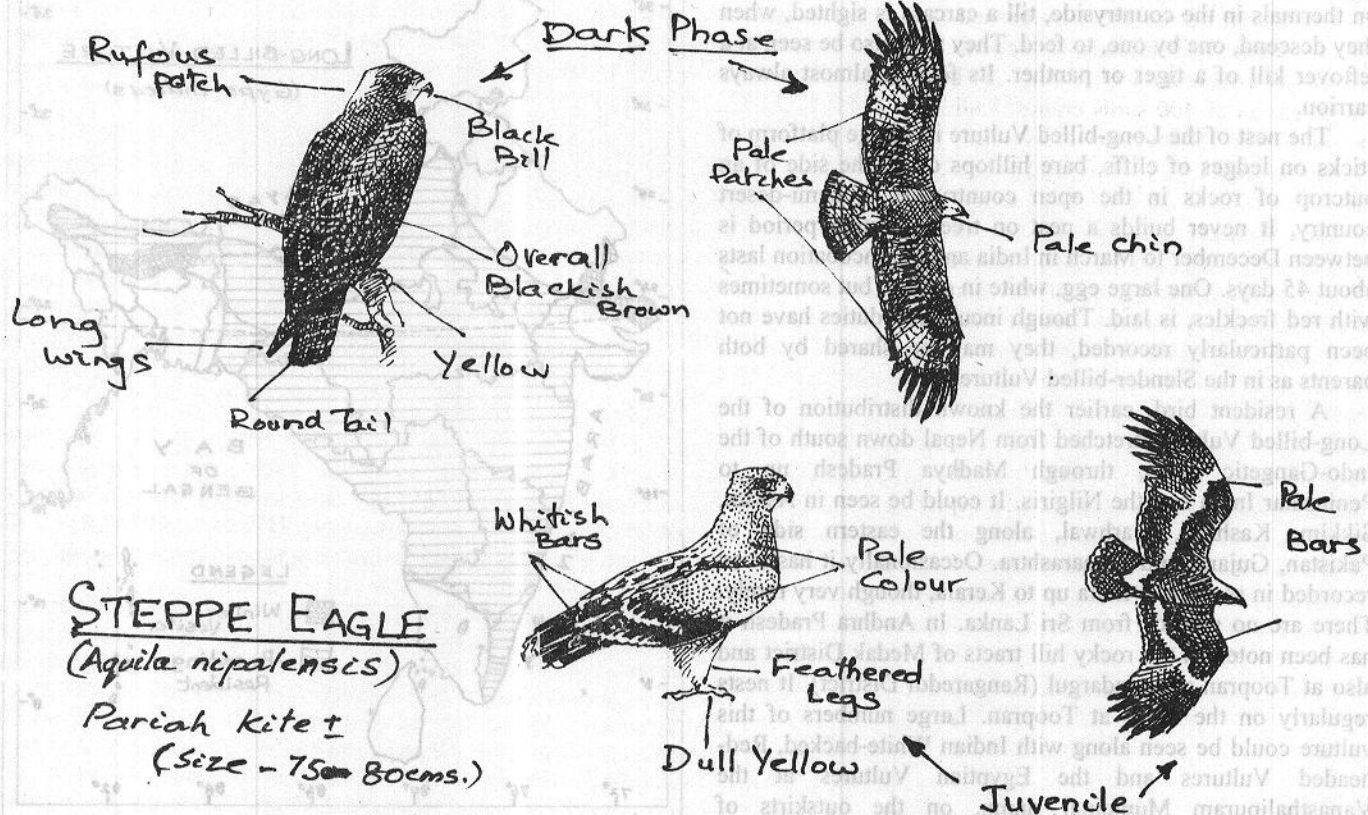
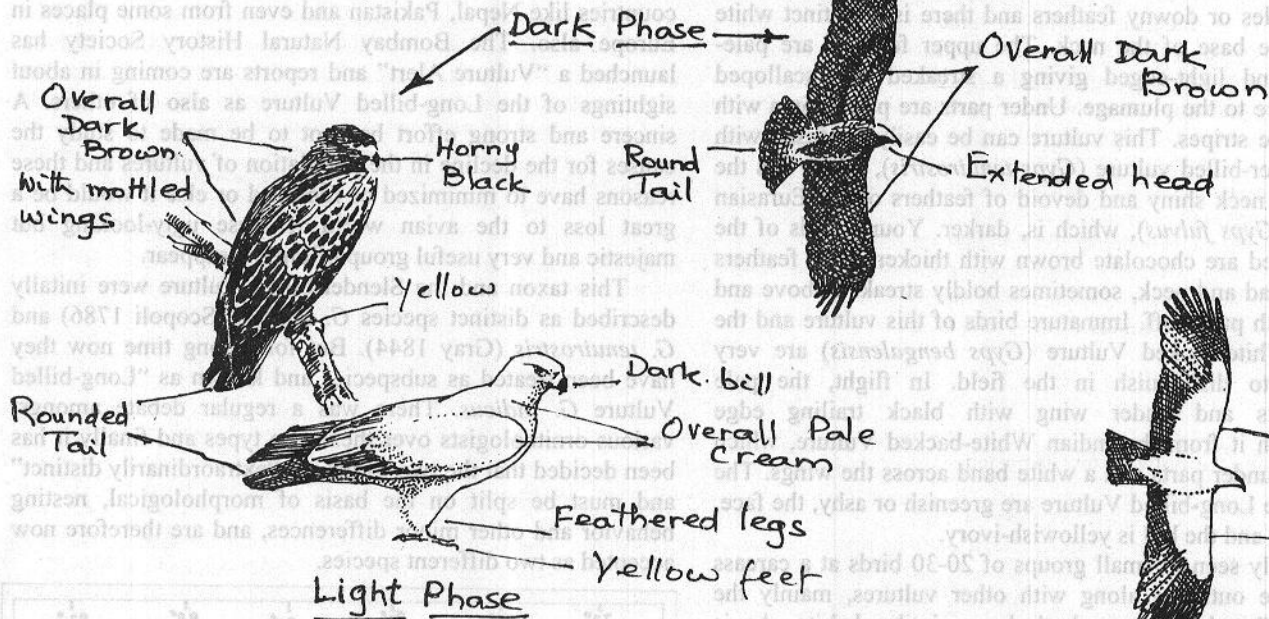
This area accounts for one-third of the entire sarus crane population in the world. "There are 1,000-1,500 sarus cranes and 100 breeding pairs in the 500 square kilometres. Though it may not be contiguous, there are at least four-five major wetlands which can be protected and even made into a sanctuary," added Sundar. The upcoming Assembly elections in the state have breathed new life into the process of handing out pattas for reclaimed land. Last week, in fact, a

bulldozer nearly rolled into the Saaman bird sanctuary in Mainpuri district—a protected area—to dig a canal through it. According to Forest Ranger R N Katiyar, the bulldozer, which would have seriously damaged the sanctuary, was stopped after a strongly worded letter from him.

In the letter, dated January 2, Katiyar asked the wildlife warden to take immediate action as the "54-kilometre land that links the Ramganga command area and the lower Ganges was meant to pass through the sanctuary..." The contract for building the canal was given to local Samajwadi Party leader Balram Singh. The wetland is a unique ecosystem which ensures that water remains in one place even in the driest of months. The reeds and micro-organisms living in the wetland don't just support the sarus crane, but also other endangered species like the Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* and Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*. In all, 26 threatened species have been spotted in the area. [SHIVA KUMAR, N <shivakumar@iocl.co.in> on <orientalbirding@yahoo.com>, 22.i.2002.]

TAWNY EAGLE*(Aquila rapax)*

Size - Pariah Kite + (65-70 cms.)



SPOTLIGHT: Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in BirdLife International's Red Data Book. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

The Long-billed Vulture is (or was) the second most numerous vulture in the sub-continent. It is a typical *Gyps* vulture, dark and light brown above with a dark head and neck. The head, nape and neck are patchily covered with bristles or downy feathers and there is a distinct white ruff at the base of the neck. The upper feathers are pale-shafted and light-edged giving a streaked and scalloped appearance to the plumage. Under parts are pale brown with broad pale stripes. This vulture can be easily confused with the Slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*), which has the head and neck shiny and devoid of feathers or the Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*), which is, darker. Young birds of the Long-billed are chocolate brown with thicker down feathers on the head and neck, sometimes boldly streaked above and below with pale buff. Immature birds of this vulture and the Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) are very difficult to distinguish in the field. In flight, the pale underparts and under wing with black trailing edge distinguish it from the Indian White-backed Vulture, which has dark under parts and a white band across the wings. The feet of the Long-billed Vulture are greenish or ashy, the face, ashy-grey and the bill is yellowish-ivory.

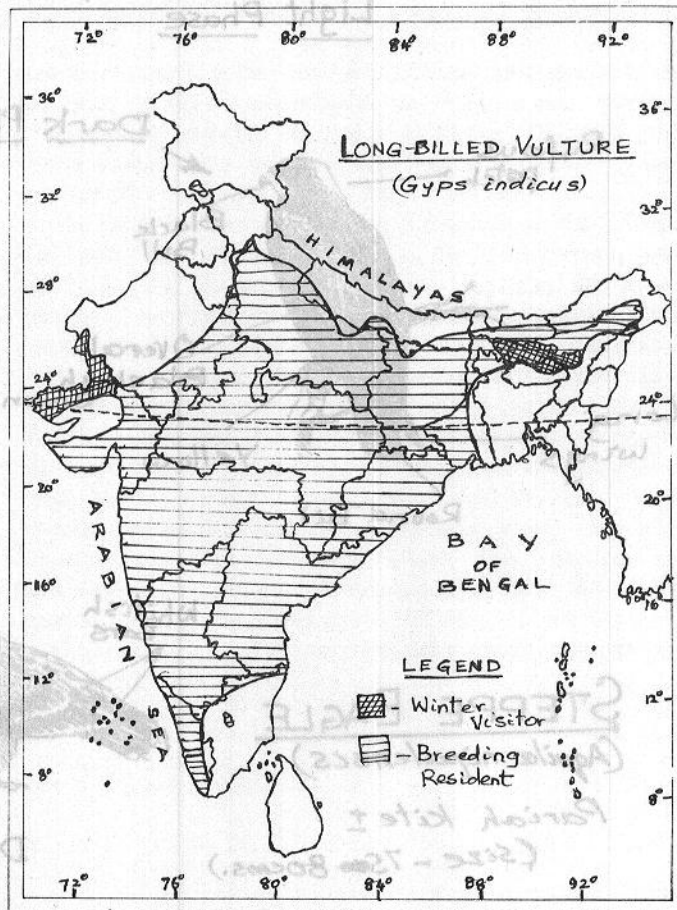
Mostly seen in small groups of 20-30 birds at a carcass on village outskirts along with other vultures, mainly the Indian White-backed, as both have similar habits. As is typical of all vultures, they can be seen gliding and soaring on thermals in the countryside, till a carcass is sighted, when they descend, one by one, to feed. They may also be seen at a leftover kill of a tiger or panther. Its food is almost always carrion.

The nest of the Long-billed Vulture is a large platform of sticks on ledges of cliffs, bare hilltops or on the side of an outcrop of rocks in the open countryside or semi-desert country. It never builds a nest on trees. Nesting period is between December to March in India and the incubation lasts about 45 days. One large egg, white in colour, but sometimes with red freckles, is laid. Though incubation duties have not been particularly recorded, they may be shared by both parents as in the Slender-billed Vulture.

A resident bird, earlier the known distribution of the Long-billed Vulture stretched from Nepal down south of the Indo-Gangetic plain, through Madhya Pradesh up to Peninsular India and the Nilgiris. It could be seen in Assam, Sikkim, Kashmir, Garhwal, along the eastern side of Pakistan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Occasionally it has been recorded in southwest India up to Kerala, though very rarely. There are no records from Sri Lanka. In Andhra Pradesh it has been noted in the rocky hill tracts of Medak District and also at Toopran and Nadargul (Rangareddi District). It nests regularly on the rocks at Toopran. Large numbers of this vulture could be seen along with Indian White-backed, Red-headed Vultures and the Egyptian Vultures at the Vanasthalipuram Municipal dump, on the outskirts of Hyderabad city. During the last few years, the vulture

populations all over the country have declined greatly and the reasons for this are not yet known. The Long-billed Vulture has also been affected severely because of this. This trend has been observed in several species of vultures in other countries like Nepal, Pakistan and even from some places in Europe also. The Bombay Natural History Society has launched a "Vulture Alert" and reports are coming in about sightings of the Long-billed Vulture as also of others. A sincere and strong effort has got to be made to study the causes for the decline in the population of vultures and these reasons have to be minimized or removed or else it would be a great loss to the avian world if these ugly-looking but majestic and very useful group of birds disappear.

This taxon and the Slender-billed Vulture were initially described as distinct species *G. indicus* (Scopoli 1786) and *G. tenuirostris* (Gray 1844). But for a long time now they have been treated as subspecies and known as "Long-billed Vulture *G. indicus*". There was a regular debate amongst various ornithologists over these two types and finally it has been decided that the two forms are "extraordinarily distinct" and must be split on the basis of morphological, nesting behavior and other minor differences, and are therefore now accepted as two different species.



LITERATURE REVIEW

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Davidar, P., Yoganand, K., and Ganesh, T. 2001. Distribution of forest birds in the Andaman Islands: importance of key habitats. *Journal of Biogeography*. 28: 663-671.

A central question in the study of bird communities is: what factors influence the number of species occurring in an area? The answer to this question is not only of theoretical interest, but also has important conservation implications. Given a choice, we should focus our efforts on the protection of areas that will support the greatest number of species over the long term. What are the characteristics of these areas?

Consider the case of oceanic islands. The Theory of Island Biogeography predicts that the greatest number of species should be found on large islands that are close to mainland sources of immigration, and that relatively few species should persist on small, distant islands. These predictions can be applied to most mainland situations too – if we think of, for example, patches (islands) of forests surrounded by an ocean of human-modified landscapes like fields, pastures, and towns. Other factors may also play a role in determining species diversity – the type of habitat, for example, and the diversity of habitats in an area.

Priya Davidar, K. Yoganand, and T. Ganesh, from Pondicherry University (K.Y. and T.G. are now elsewhere) have carried out extensive field surveys in the Andamans to count the number of bird species on the various islands. Over a period of three years, they censused birds on 45 islands of different size, isolation, latitude, and mixture of habitats. In their analyses, they focus on forest birds known to breed in the archipelago.

Their results confirm a major prediction – that larger islands will have more species; but, as is clear from the accompanying figure, the number of species does not increase indefinitely with size. This is comforting, because it means that we may not have to protect unrealistically large areas while trying to include as many species as possible. As expected, habitat diversity (only counting forest habitats, e.g., wet forests, deciduous forests) was also correlated with number of species; islands with diverse habitats support more species. Larger islands, of course, have a greater diversity of habitats simply by virtue of

their size, so how can one separate the effect of habitat from that of size? Davidar *et al.* do this by examining a subset of islands – those smaller than 15 km². The relationship between habitat diversity and number of species holds even within this subset, suggesting that habitat diversity influences species number independent of island size. What about the specific habitats? It appears that there are more species in wet forests than in any other habitat. Islands with wet forests tend to have more species than those without wet forests. There is a latitudinal gradient in rainfall in the Andamans, and wet forests increase as one goes from North to South. Based on these results, the authors suggest that highest conservation priority be given to larger islands that support wet forests, and that the role of specific habitats in maintaining bird diversity is critical and needs to be studied further.

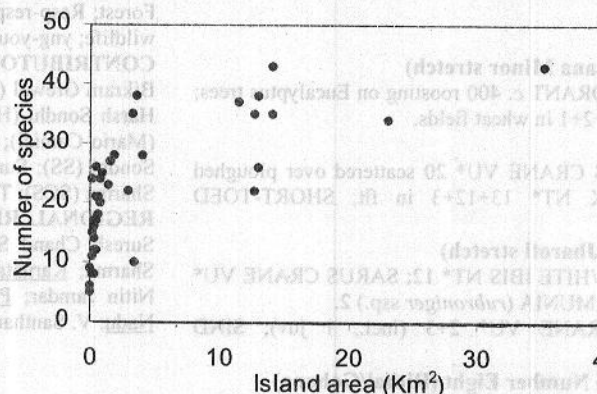


Figure 1. Relationship between island size and number of species. Six larger islands (92-1348 Km²) are not shown - these have 41-47 species.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '**' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follows Manakadan & Pittie (2001): Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Buceros* 6(1): i-ix, 1-38. Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

DELHI

Delhi Canal (Bawana-Daryapur stretch)

7.xii (SCS): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 pair in a ploughed field; BLACK IBIS 27 on Eucalyptus tree; GREATER SPOTTED

EAGLE VU* 1+1 ad; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+3 (incl., 1 juv.) +1+2+2+3+2 in surrounding fields.

Jor Bagh

16.xii (AA): INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE CR* 1 ad., fetching stick to N under const., 4m up a Silver Oak.

Okhla and surrounding areas

2.xii (ND, others): GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 3 ad.

17.xii (KBB, SV): YELLOW-LEGGED GULL 1.

HARYANA**GURGAON DISTRICT****Basai Wetland**

9.xii (BH, ND, Others): PAINTED STORK NT* 5; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 15; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 350; WHITE-TAILED LAPWING 50+.

15.xii (BH, ND, Others): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 pair; RUDDY SHELDUC 46; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; REDHEADED MERLIN 1 pair; WHITETAILED LAPWING 50+; NORTHERN LAPWING 18; COLLARED SAND MARTIN c. 50.

19.xii (BH, BG, KK): SARUS CRANE VU* 1 hrd.

Sultanpur National Park

8.xii (BH, SC, Others): GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1 ad; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT**Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary**

8.xii (AS, SS, SM, HS, SCS): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; GREYLAG GOOSE c. 400; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 400; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair.

24.xii (HSS, MC, T, SCS, SM): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 pair; GREYLAG GOOSE c. 600; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 200; LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD 2 ad; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 1 ad; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; BRONZEWINGED JACANA 1 ad (uncommon).

SONIPAT DISTRICT**Delhi Canal (Rohat-Harsana Minor stretch)**

22.xii (SCS, SM): CORMORANT c. 400 roosting on Eucalyptus trees; SARUS CRANE VU* 3+2+2+1 in wheat fields.

Drain Number Eight

17.xii (SCS, SM): SARUS CRANE VU* 20 scattered over ploughed fields; PAINTED STORK NT* 13+12+3 in flt; SHORT-TOED SNAKE-EAGLE 2 in flt.

Gurgaon Canal (Kakroi-Jharoti stretch)2.xii (SCS): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 12; SARUS CRANE VU* 7+2+2; BLACK-HEADED MUNIA (*rubroniger* sp.) 2.

6.xii (SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 2+3 (incl., 1 juv); SIND SPARROW 6.

JLN Feeder Canal/Drain Number Eight (Rithal/Gohana)

13.xii (SCS): PLUMBEOUS REDSTART 1 F; WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART 1 ad., (first record for the Delhi region).

16.xii (SCS, SM): CORMORANT c. 500 roosting on Eucalyptus trees; PAINTED STORK VU* 16 in flt; SPOTTED OWLET 1 being mobbed and chased by 1 GREY-HEADED FLYCATCHER & 4 HUME'S WARBLERS; PLUMBEOUS REDSTART & WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART still around.

23.xii (MC, T, SCS): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; BRAHMINY KITE 1+2 (uncommon); PLUMBEOUS REDSTART & WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART still there.

25.xii (HSS, SCS, SM, RS): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 26; COMB DUCK 28; BOOTED EAGLE 1 dark phase, in flt; PLUMBEOUS REDSTART & WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART still there.

Mohamedabad Marshes

15.xii (SCS, SM): PAINTED STORK NT* 15 in flight; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 8; COMB DUCK 37; FERRUGINOUS POCHARD NT* 20; RUFF 1,000+.

23.xii (MC, T, SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 2+1+4+2+2 (hrd trumpeting of 1); SIND SPARROW 32 in *babul* and tall grasses.**Rohat Pond**

6.xii (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT* 5; SARUS CRANE VU* 2.

22.xii (SCS, SM): OSPREY 1.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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PIGEON POST

"I am thankful to Mr. A.M.K. Bharos, Dr. V. Santharam and Dr. Asad Rahmani for bringing to my notice certain areas of distribution which were missed out in the column 'Spotlight' in different issues of *Pitta*. The distribution of the threatened species of the region as shown on the map and mentioned in the text is as given in the text and maps in *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent* (Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp, 1999), *Fauna of British India* (Baker, 1922-30), *Bibliographic Index to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent* (Pittie, 2001), *Journals* of the B.N.H.S. and *Mayura*, journal of B.S.A.P. But in spite of my best efforts, some references do get missed out. The whole idea of starting this column was to invite participation from all those involved with bird studies in the region to write to us of their experiences and records. This would fill up the gaps in the known distribution of the threatened species. In fact there is an appeal at the beginning of 'Spotlight' whenever it appears in *Pitta*, requesting for such feedback. This effort on the part of all those who read the newsletter, besides giving me enough reason to justify writing such a column, would most certainly give a much better picture of the distribution as well as the population of some of the threatened birds of the Indian sub-continent."

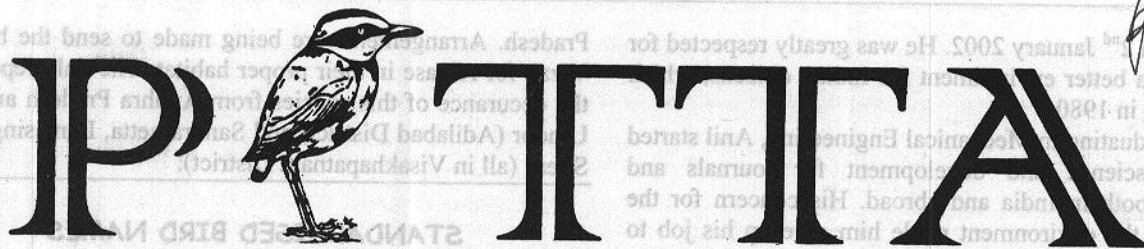
—Siraj A. Taher, Hyderabad.

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Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 131: March 2002

PROGRAMME

Inland 24/3/2002

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 31-iii-2002: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District: At 692msl, and part of the Anantgiri Reserve Forest block, Anantgiri is famous for its TB sanatorium and salubrious climate. There will be a rash of warblers and other passerine migrants on their way back to summer quarters. A bonus might be the resident pair of Crested Hawk-Eagles that nest in an Eucalyptus plantation. Other attractions are Orange-headed Ground-Thrush, White-eye, Fantail Flycatchers, Golden Oriole, etc. Route: Mehdiapatnam—Tipu Bridge at Artillery Centre—Chilkur—Moinabad—Vikarabad—Anantgiri. Distance is about 60km from the city. Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.45am and assemble near bus stand at Anantgiri. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads at 6.15am. This will be a full-day trip. Carry water and food if you plan to stay the day. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

Sunday, 7-iv-2002: Manjira Barrage, Medak District: The main attraction at Manjira is a heronry (reached by boat) of Painted Stork and Openbill Stork. Other attractions include a wide variety of waterfowl and perhaps a wild Mugger Crocodile or two. Route: Panjagutta—Patancheru—Sangareddi (turn left after the police station)—Manjira Barrage. Distance is about 60km from the city. Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.45am and assemble in the Environment Education Centre of the Forest Dept. Carry water and food if you plan to stay for the day. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads at 6.15am. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-iii-2002, 6pm: Film show. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* and Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* sighted in Andhra Pradesh

During fieldwork for SACON's Inland Wetlands of India project, BSAP member Raajeev Mathew sighting two Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* at Thattipudi Reservoir on the Gosthani River in Vizianagaram District, A.P. The pair was seen during all the three visits that he made to the reservoir on 11, 12 & 13 February. "This elusive species has a very small, declining population as a result of loss and degradation of wetlands and lowland forests, which qualifies it as Vulnerable. The Masked Finfoot occurs patchily from north-east India and Bangladesh through continental South-East Asia to Vietnam. In the non-breeding season it occurs southwards to Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, Indonesia. The species is a very rare breeding visitor (or possibly resident) in north-eastern states, mainly Assam," [BirdLife International¹] There are a few very old records from Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur too. "The Masked Finfoot's (migratory) movements remain poorly understood...On migration the species has turned up in odd places...the picture of movements in this species is only just emerging

and appears to be rather complex; it deserves further study," (BirdLife International).

Raajeev also reports the sighting of a Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* at Chintapalli, Visakhapatnam District. This is a Near Threatened species (BirdLife International) found in the Western Ghats, central and eastern Himalayas and extreme northeast India. The sighting of this species in the northern Eastern Ghats complex is 'a puzzlement' but it is not the first. In 1946, R.C. Bell² reported seeing it in these same ranges!

While the finfoot is a strong contender for being added to the Checklist of birds of Andhra Pradesh, as it was seen on 3 different occasions, the hornbill may not, having been seen once. But it will be prudent to do this only after further sightings in the future.

Obituary: Anil Agarwal (1947-2002)

Siraj A. Taher

For more than two decades he fought the battle against environmental degradation. For a decade he also waged a personal war against the dreaded cancer. He was successful with the first but not with the disease. Anil Agarwal died in

¹ BirdLife International (2001): *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book*. Vol. 1, pp. 1278-1293. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

² Bell, R.C. (1946): 'Birds of Vizagapatnam District' - some notable omissions. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 46(1): 189-190.

Dehra Dun on 2nd January 2002. He was greatly respected for his work for a better environment for Indian citizens, which he had started in 1980.

After graduating in Mechanical Engineering, Anil started writing on science and development for journals and newspapers, both in India and abroad. His concern for the protection of the environment made him give up his job to start the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in 1980. Agarwal was convinced that science, development and environment were linked basically with the lives of the people. In 1982, CSE brought out the first *The State of India's Environment—1982. A Citizen's Report*. This was followed by another report in 1985. Later several reports concerning individual issues were brought out. He was strongly supported in these ventures by like-minded persons and enlightened government officials. The CSE was instrumental in lobbying to educate the government and the people on several important environmental issues and highlighting the negative aspects of the government's policies and planning. With the strong motivation to inform the people, of India's environmental problems, the CSE started the monthly magazine *Down to Earth* in 1982.

Anil was justifiably honoured with the Padma Shri in 1986 and the Padma Bhushan in 2000. In this year, he also received the Norman Borlaug Global Environmental Leadership Awards.

In Anil Agarwal's passing away the country has lost a dynamic and staunch environmentalist.

BIRD TRADE

Siraj A. Taher

On 10th February 2002, a well-wisher of the Society, happened to visit the pet bird market at Mahboob Chowk near Charminar, Hyderabad. What he saw there was an eye-opener. Four species of the five on sale were from the north-eastern Himalayan region with very limited ranges. These were Red billed *Lophrix Lutea*—2; White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulx leucolophus*—4; Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis*—1; and Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*—2. The Green Munia *Amandava formosa*—3, is from central India. The first 4 species are Threatened Species in India and the fifth the Green Munia is listed as Highly Vulnerable in the Red Data Book of Threatened Birds of Asia (Bird life International—2001). The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department was informed of this but owing to lack of proper administrative arrangements, action could not be taken against the traders. The birds were in the market for 3-4 days, during which the 3 Green Munias (all males) were purchased for Rs.100/-. Since the asking price of the other birds was very high (Rs.2000-3000 a pair) they could not be bought. Probably these were sold to some buyers. Now there are several perplexing questions. How did the bird land up in Hyderabad? Is there a regular market for them here? From where were they brought to the Hyderabad bird market? One suspects they have come here from some up-country markets, (the trader claimed to have brought them from Bangalore). Pet-bird breeders in Hyderabad say that these birds are never bred by anybody and must have been caught in the wild. The 3 Green Munias are still in Hyderabad, as they have to be released in Visakhapatnam District in North-East Andhra

Pradesh. Arrangements are being made to send the birds to Vizag for release in their proper habitat. The only reports, of the occurrence of this species from Andhra Pradesh are from Uttoor (Adilabad District) and Sankrametta, Lamasinghi and Sileru (all in Visakhapatnam District).

STANDARDISED BIRD NAMES

Siraj A. Taher

For the past decade, there has been a great upheaval and confusion in the birding community worldwide regarding the Scientific and English names of birds and their classification. This was brought about after the publication of *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World* by Charles G. Sibley and Burt L. Monroe, *Phylogeny and Classification of Birds—A study in Molecular Evolution*; Charles G. Sibley and Jon E. Ahlquist, *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* by Tim Inskipp, Nigel Lindsey and William Duckworth, and *Birds of the Indian Sub continent* by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. Not having any directions or guidance given by any international or national agency, there was widespread chaos, more so in India, where everyone seemed to be rudderless. While Mr. Partidge became Mr. Francolin and occupied the top position in the list, the Spotted Munia suddenly became rich, having acquired a "Silverbill". Also in the process, the handsome and very local Mahratta Woodpecker burnt itself and was called the "Flameback" while the Broadbilled Roller became the "Dollarbird". There seemed no rhyme or reason to bring about such drastic and strange changes in the well-known and established English names of our birds. Time was running out and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), the principal Ornithological agency in the region, had to act. It moved itself or was compelled to move and after many consultations, deliberations, debates, comments and some brickbats, has now come out with the STANDARDISED COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC NAMES OF THE BIRD OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT. This list has been brought out in the latest issue (Vol. 6, No. 1, 2001) of *Buceros*, the Envis newsletter on avian ecology and Indian wetlands. This has been compiled by Ranjit Mankadan (BNHS) and Aasheesh Pittie (BSAP) who have worked very hard and diligently on this list. This new list, more or less, follows the order as given by S.D. Ripley and Salim Ali with minimal changes in the classification, genus or species and the addition of qualifiers to certain bird names. There may be changes that one may not agree with, but then it is impossible to please everyone. Change is a fact of life and so it must be accepted. Now it is up to all ornithologists and birders in the Indian sub-continent to accept these changes and do justice to the efforts of all those who worked to bring out this publication. Every one of us working with or on birds of the region should use this list and consult it regularly, for the sake of uniformity in the sub-continent and to avoid confusion. A similar appeal has been made by the Editors of *Buceros* and it is necessary to pay heed to it. For a copy of the list write to: ENVIS CENTRE, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400023.

We are grateful to Dr John Peacock for donating a pair of Super Zenith Light-weight 6x30 binoculars to the Society.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-50

"Hartert must have been oppressed by dismal thoughts while he was sitting next to the great Sharpe in the Senckenberg Museum on that May 12, 1891. How different was his own situation! Born in Hamburg on October 29, 1859, the son of an army officer, he was already approaching 32 and still could not think of marrying. What good was it that he had traveled more than any contemporary German zoologist, or that nobody could hold a candle to him as an expert on birds and mammals? As long as his abilities carried no academic certificate, he was regarded by everyone as merely an industrious collector. Trusting blindly in his luck, from boyhood up he had done nothing but what he enjoyed. He had begun by collecting eggs when he was in the Breslau Gymnasium. Then came the free and easy years in East Prussia, where he learned taxidermy in Königsberg and for months stalked the woods with his gun, first to make his own bird collection, and then, in the early summers of 1882 to 1884, to oblige the elderly Eugen von Homeyer. Other boys were sitting in lecture halls after graduating from the Gymnasium, but in summer he was to be found in the marshes and on the North Sea beaches, and in winter among his eggs and bird books. Those were his apprentice years, but then came his years of travel, which took him into the tropics of two hemispheres. When he was 24 he joined the Flegel expedition, 1885-86, to collect in the Hausa country of northern Nigeria, and barely a year later he went to southern Asia, to earn some money again by collecting insects, birds, and mammals. From 1887 to 1889 he led exactly the sort of life he liked in the woods of Sumatra and Perak, in the wilderness of Upper Assam, and in the dry wastes of Rajputana. While he learned more from the observation of nature than he could have done from all the books, jobs and honors were being awarded to others. This could not continue indefinitely. Was he to go on living off his father, who in the meanwhile had retired as a major general and had moved to Marburg? Was he to continue with his lectures to geographical societies and colonists' clubs, which yielded hardly anything more than applause? Finally he pinned his hopes on Frankfurt, which is not far from Marburg. There, in November 1889 [The first FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, BIRDS volume, on Passeres, by Eugene W. Oates was published on 30th December 1889, and Hugh Whistler was born on 29th September that year—K.G.], six months after he returned from India, he was commissioned to work through and catalogue the 10,000 mounted birds in the Senckenberg Museum..."

"...Hartert received a letter from the British Museum [in 1891—K.G.], commissioning him to come to London to work over the nightjars and swifts for the sixteenth volume of the *Catalogue of Birds*, which had originally been allotted to Shelley. This was an earnest of Sharpe's friendship."

"A few days after the letter arrived Hartert married Claudia Endres and they moved to England, without imagining that it would be their home for the next 38 years, because there was nothing to suggest that the settled position they wanted would be attained so soon. After Hartert polished off his commission for the British Museum in the startlingly brief time of eight months, he would still have been without a definite job if his new friends had not got to work in good time. Through Dresser he made the acquaintance of young Walter Rothschild (1868-1937), who two years earlier had built himself a small zoological museum at Tring, an hour's train ride from London. Rothschild's wealth quickly made it famous and respected...they [the Harterts—K.G.] combed the islands in the Caribbean until, at the beginning of August 1892, they were surprised by a telegram from Rothschild summoning them back in a hurry, because Hartert was to become director of the Tring Museum."

"He had been lucky again, because the English curator had been dismissed by Rothschild for gross abuse of confidence, and Dr. Günther had advised him to telegraph to Curaçao."

"The unparalleled rise of the Tring Museum began on the day when Hartert first entered the little English town in its green setting. After two decades the two huge departments of birds and lepidoptera eclipsed those of all museums on the Continent and rivaled those of the British Museum. Sharpe had helped his most dangerous competitor into the saddle with his own hand, but he never regretted it. Only death, which unexpectedly claimed him on Christmas Day, 1909, could loosen the bonds of friendship between the two most important ornithologists of their generation. The conservative and the radical reformer loved each other, resented each other, and competed against each other for the great traveling collectors and the most precious rarities, the more enthusiastically because triumph sweetened the prize. When Sharpe reached 400,000 birds and eggs in 1908, Hartert was already on his heels. He never quite recovered from the all too early death of his only congenial rival and lively companion."

"Sharpe had shown special ability in acquiring gifts of private collections to enrich the British Museum, but the Tring Museum, too, profited from the zeal of earlier collectors...In 1912 an enormous collection of Australian birds (more than 45,000, and more than all the bird skins owned at the time by the Berlin Museum) was obtained from Gregory M. Mathews. But the most important acquisitions of the Tring Museum came from the collectors whom Rothschild and Hartert sent out to all the areas marked "unexplored" on the map. They concentrated particularly on the Indo-Australian islands and on New Guinea, because Wallace and the collectors for the museums in Leiden and Genoa had been able to complete only half their job, and anyone who wanted to make a thorough study of the phenomena of geographic variation could hardly find a more rewarding field."

"During all these years [1892 to 1926—K.G.] the Tring Museum had grown steadily and had become outstanding for the choiceness and the painstakingly exact arrangement of its collections. Several of those who were now leading ornithologists had been Hartert's students at Tring, and hardly any of them had failed to visit the quiet little country town in order to learn more. Hartert's life work was complete when in 1930, soon after his seventieth birthday had been celebrated by ornithologists, he retired to spend his remaining days with his wife in his native country, and to complete in the Berlin Museum the supplements to his great work [*Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*, 1903-1922—K.G.]. It was hard for him to leave the treasures that he had helped to accumulate over the decades: 280,000 bird skins and a library of 30,000 volumes! All this, he thought, was firmly established and would last for centuries."

"But he too had to realize painfully the vanity of calculations and the mutability of things. In 1932 Ernst Hartert had a study opposite mine. I can never forget how, on a gray February morning, he came staggering in to me with an envelope in his fingertips, and sank into a chair. "My collection! My collection!" he stammered out, his chest heaving and his clear eyes swimming with tears."

"The birds of the Tring Museum were even then being packed into cases, for shipment to the American Museum of Natural History in New York."

"Twenty months later, on November 11, 1933, Ernst Hartert died."

[Erwin Stresemann, 1975, "*Ornithology. From Aristotle to the Present*". xii+432 pp. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A., and London, England, pp. 255, 257-259, 267-268.]

Role models are important persons whose lives and achievements (and idiosyncracies!) inspire young people to follow in their footsteps, if motivated enough, that is. I have quoted synoptic histories of two of the most famous, productive, ornithologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—Richard Bowdler Sharpe and Ernst Hartert—so as to try and educate readers of the travails and triumphs that are part of one's career and life. Also to highlight the importance of these decades in completely 'revolutionizing' the ornithological scene in the adoption of trinomial names and formulation of a new Code of Nomenclature. After Sharpe's death in 1909, Hartert was instrumental in the unfortunate "change over," and a new emphasis given to subspecies, rather than to species. It was yet another 'American revolution.' The "spark" from that continent set fire to the hitherto sane understanding of real species and burnt down the existing concept in order to introduce what was hailed as an "evolutionary species concept" from the earlier "biological" one. The sound backbone of Linnaean binomial nomenclature had also splintered after "a 20-year siege" by neo-Darwinists who thought subspecies were needed to document evolutionary relationships of closely related species that the binomial system had apparently failed to do! Nomenclature also suffered after the sensible Strickland Code had been relegated to the dustbin in favour of a new, rigorous, "mechanized" one. This was the beginning of the 'Americanization' of Ornithology!

As Ernst Mayr wrote in his chapter "Materials for a History of American Ornithology" (in Stresemann, 1975: 365-396) "Old World ornithologists have always been saddened by the fact that the havoc created by two world wars permitted the shift of the center of ornithological activity to the New World to such an extent that not only the *Check-list of Birds of the World* but also the standard work on the Eurasian fauna [Charles Vaurie's *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna*, 1959 & 1965—K.G.] were written in America by American ornithologists."

The power of money and the "Quit India" movement led by M.K. Gandhi, also shifted the focus of learning about our Indian sub-continent birds from European workers to Americans around the 1930s, when a Vice-Patron of the Bombay Natural History Society, an American business magnate, Mr A.S. Vernay, financed the Ornithological Survey of the Eastern Ghats by V.S. La Personne and N.A. Baptista (who also collected Mammals) of the Society. This was worked out by Whistler and Kinnear and published in 17 parts in the *Journal of the B.N.H.S.* (34: 386 to 39: 463) from 1930 to 1937, covering a total of 311 pages. With the famous Rothschild Bird Collection being acquired by the American Museum of Natural History, New York, in 1932, through the efforts of Frank A. Chapman and Leonard C. Sanford, much Oriental and Indian sub-continent bird material began filling museums' trays and drawers in North America. Besides the New York Museum, others in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and also those of the Universities of Michigan and Yale, not least the museums in Ottawa and Toronto (in Canada) began accumulating zoological specimens from our region. The advent of S.D. Ripley during the Second World War in the early 1940s into our sub-continent and his bonding with Salim Ali finally sealed the fate of the future of ornithological studies on Indian birds. 'Americanization' seemed inevitable here also now! Even though the finely illustrated guide books of Grimmett, the Inskipp couple and of Kazmierczak have originated in Europe, their 'Americanization' is also pretty evident through blind faith in the new Sibley—Monroe—Ahluquist classification (Wetmore's 1960 classic, "A CLASSIFICATION FOR THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD", though also American, is much more logical, phylogenetically) and their penchant for "new" English names with very little practical justification. Another Guide is soon to be 'conferred' upon us poor sub-continenters—a Smithsonian synoptic update of the INDIAN HANDBOOK which latter was largely written by Ripley and his assistants, with minimal 'tasty' biological notes by Salim Ali (see INDIAN HANDBOOK, 10: vii-viii; 1974).

The great bird collections of the western world exemplify the lacunae of these in our own countries of this sub-continent. Fifty-plus years of 'independence' have resulted in little if not nothing of value to our own pride of purpose in building adequately large research collections of our rich biodiversity. It is ignorance and supreme irresponsibility (coloured by modern "Gandhian" values, which should have no place in Science) that makes us dependent for our databases held in foreign museums and universities. Except for a minimal number of species that have perhaps gone "extinct" in these decades (the Pink-headed Duck, and the Mountain Pygmy Partridge not "Quail"), populations of a vast majority of other native species are still flying about here. Humayun Abdulali's wish needs to be fulfilled—make the B.N.H.S. bird collection, at least (if not that of the Zoological Survey of India's as well), more or less complete, by sampling our avifauna for species (and "subspecies") not held in Bombay and Calcutta. If you cannot give an incontestable, unquestionable name to your object of observation, all your data on it are useless! The recent guide books, put together, do not even remotely help me do this realistically, without some doubt, and make me refer to much of the older literature for help. The B.N.H.S.' recent "standardised names," coined by Manakadan & Pittie [2001, *Buceros* 6(1): ix+37 pp.], in no way translate the reality that exists in nature, in my studied opinion, and this will be explained, in detail, in my forthcoming critique — "AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF *BUCEROS*".

[Errata: Letter # 48—Second quotation on Page 3, Para 1, Line 2 delete "probably have been" which was printed again; Page 4, Text Para 3, Line 4 from bottom should read "analysing." Letter # 49—Page 4, Para 1, Line 4 from bottom should read "Indian J. Forestry"; after "Errata" should read "Letter # 48."]

[NOTE: My Letter # 45, on late Dr S.D. Ripley, published in *Pitta* No. 125: 3-5 (September 2001) is available as a 2-page corrected reprint to whoever may request me for it.—K.G.]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

FIELD CRAFT

I am putting down a few 'jizz' and plumage features that may be found helpful in isolating a particular *Accipiter* for closer examination. It is stressed that these are not definitive identification points and an attempt should invariably be made—as far as possible, of course—to observe as many of the Guide-book details before clinching the ID. Let's use the most familiar of the three, Shikra, as a basis for comparison."

"Briefly, on first view, I try to catch the 'face' and the tail of the bird. The markings on the under parts, under wing patterns etc., come next, bird permitting! These latter are well covered in the Guide-books."

"Adult Besra: In a flash fly-past, such as a bird dashing across a path into a thicket, the Besra's three broad dark tail bands show well and the tail appears squarer at the end than Shikra's. I find this a good mark, though the square(r)-cut tail is not obvious in a soaring bird. The adult Shikra's central tail feathers are un-barred [in a male, not so in a female—HT], the outer tail feathers have several narrow bars, which are not very conspicuous. The darker upper parts and the small size of the male Besra often attract attention. The rather broad blackish mesial [=gular—HT] throat stripe, yellow eyes deep-set in a dark face and the contrast between the dark cheeks and whitish throat give the Besra a different 'expression' compared to the plainer 'face' of a Shikra (whose greyish or greyish-rufous cheeks merge into the paler throat and the mesial line is thin and pale gray). I find this difference quite eye-catching, even in a quick view of a low-flying bird."

"Adult Eurasian Sparrowhawk: The 3-4 visible broad dark tail-bars are again conspicuous, and the tail, especially in the larger female, appears more 'ample' than the Shikra's, much more so than Besra's. This is especially evident in flying birds. I suspect there is also a subtle difference in flight style. In Islamabad, where Eurasian is often seen in winter, I note that the larger female, particularly, often seems to have slightly slower, more elastic wing beats in flapping or hunting flight compared to Shikra or Besra. She may show a somewhat bulging crop (breast), giving her a different profile (not unlike a Goshawk)."

"The 'face' is useful in identifying both sexes. The male's rufous cheeks contrasting with dark grey top-of-head and nape are striking and are not matched by either Shikra or Besra. The male may sometimes show a thin pale eyebrow (not matched by either Shikra or Besra), but the female has a long well marked pale eyebrow and broad darkish line through her eye, which is distinctive even in flight and gives her a distinctly 'fierce' expression. The obviously greyer barring on the female's under parts is often evident." [Note eye-colour also. Both, Besra and Eurasian adult males have orange-red eyes whereas an adult male Shikra has blood-red eyes—HT].

"Adult Shikra: 'Plainest' (least marked) of the three, both face and tail. The Shikra's white thigh feathers are distinctive in a perched bird. Both Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Besra have strongly barred thighs."

"Juveniles/Immatures: *Immature Shikra* is often paler above, and its tail is more narrowly and numerous barred than both the other two species. It is also the most definitively and broadly streaked below. *Immature Besra* is heavily marked with narrower, darker streaks on the breast and bars on flanks. *Immature Eurasian* always seems to look 'large' to me and gives impression of numerous broken cross-bars below rather than streaks, and is more like the Eurasian female. The face pattern does not work for immature birds, all of which show pale eyebrows and darker sides of the face, most evident in an immature Eurasian."

[Sudhir Vyas, <sudhir_vyas2001@yahoo.co.in> on <delhibird@yahooogroups.com> Date: Sunday, December 09, 2001 8:17 PM with inputs by Humayun Taher, 'HT', within brackets.]

SPOTLIGHT: Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in BirdLife International's Red Data Book. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

A large blackish-brown, squarish-looking bird with a naked head, a dark-grey neck and a whitish ruff of soft feathers at its base. When sitting on trees, it pulls back its head and neck into the shoulders giving the bird a hunched appearance. While perched, in low flight or banking, a white band on the lower back identified it perfectly and also gives the bird its name. In overhead flight a whitish-band along the underside of the wings and the dark body contrasts with the Eurasian Griffon's *Gyps fulvus* whitish body. The Indian White-backed Vulture is also less agile in flight. Juvenile birds are distinguished by lack of white on the rump and are more brown in colour. They could be confused with Long-billed Vultures *Gyps indicus*.

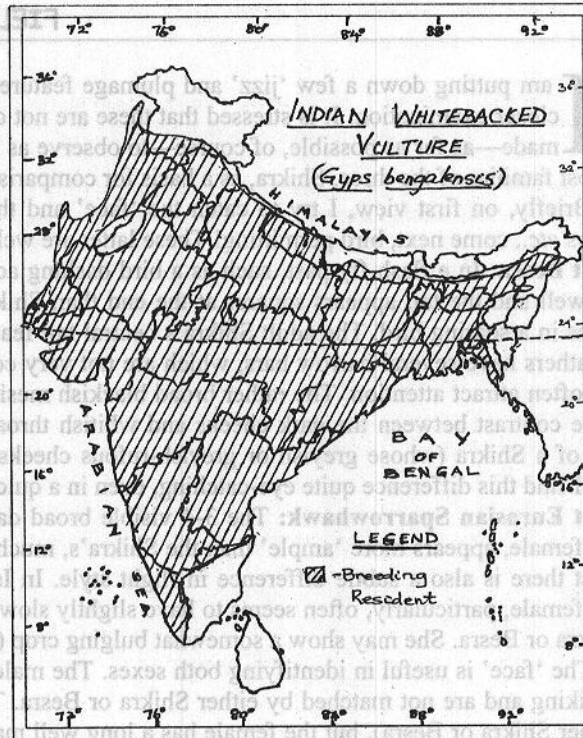
Normally not gregarious, they are usually seen in small groups in association with other vultures, mostly perched on tree-tops in the open country or on roof-tops and walls in the vicinity of slaughter houses and refuse dumps. They patrol the skies throughout the day, covering large areas and when a carcass is sighted, one vulture slowly comes down to the ground, followed by a second and a third and so on till out of nowhere 30-40 birds are converging onto the dead animal. Their eyesight seems remarkably keen but the

quickness of the discovery of a carcass, when in the open or hidden under trees, could also be due to being guided by the movements of crows, pariah dogs and other scavengers. Much more than the keen eyesight and a purposeful descent and walk up to the dead animal is the astonishing speed and thoroughness with which they will demolish even a large carcass, eating everything except the very large bones. On the ground, these vultures are clumsy on foot and repulsive looking from close range but on outspread wings, gliding and soaring they look majestic and graceful. Its food is always carrion, fresh or putrid. While feeding, which it does along with the Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, Long-billed, or Griffon, there will be much jostling, pushing, prancing, screeching and calling, each bird trying to get the better of the other. In spite of its dirty feeding habits, the White-backed Vulture, like the other vultures is a clean bird and particular about bathing in shallow water and then sunning on the ground with open wings.

This vulture always breeds in scattered colonies of 30-40 birds on large trees, mostly peepal, banyan, mango or sheesham. The shallow nest is made up with sticks and twigs and lined with leaves and skin from dead animals and constructed mostly near villages or on

avenue trees. There are added on to and built upon every year. Mating is very noisy and mostly takes place on the nest. Usually a single egg, always white, with a thick and strong shell, is laid. Occasionally the egg may be faintly marked with grey-brown or reddish-brown blotches. Incubation is for 45 days. Both parents share all duties from nest-building, incubating, to feeding.

At one time the White-backed Vulture was the most numerous and widely distributed vulture in the country. It could be found from Pakistan, Kashmir, Nepal down through Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, north-eastern hill states, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Bihar and Orissa. It is not found in northern Himalaya and parts of northeast and northwest India and in Sri Lanka. Extraliminally it has been recorded from Afghanistan, southeast Iran, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Kampuchea and southern China. But it could be extinct in some of these places now. In spite of such a wide distribution and large numbers, like all vultures the White-backed is also severely threatened in India. The reasons are not very definite but it could be some viral disease, poisoning or even non-availability of carcasses. The BirdLife International's recently published *Threatened Birds of Asia* lists this bird as CRITICAL. Proper studies need to be made to determine factors responsible for the decline of this as well as other vultures and to try and remove them at the earliest.



LITERATURE REVIEW

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Manel, S., Buckton, S.T., and Ormerod, S.J. 2000. Testing large-scale hypotheses using surveys: the effects of land use on the habitats, invertebrates and birds of Himalayan rivers. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 37:756-770.

Himalayan rivers support one of the world's most diverse collections of specialist river birds, including dippers, redstarts, and a number of forktails. The catchment areas of many of these rivers are disturbed by human activities, most notably agriculture. How then does intensive agriculture in river catchments affect stream quality and the diversity of specialist river birds? The authors of this paper, from universities in France and the UK, attempted to answer this question by surveying 180 Himalayan streams from the Kumaon region in India, east across the span of Nepal during three winters. At each of these sites, the authors made lists of birds, and collected information on topography, land use, water chemistry, and aquatic insects. Here we come up against a major problem. The presence and abundance of bird species are almost certainly affected by many different factors. So if, for example, we find that there are fewer birds in faster-flowing streams, can we conclude that stream velocity is a *cause* of bird abundance? No, because the actual cause might be a third, unmeasured, factor like altitude (which may influence both birds and stream flow independently). One way of reducing this problem of interpretation is to measure all factors that could possibly influence bird abundance, and then to use statistical techniques to try and separate the effects (if any) of individual factors. This is not a perfect solution (for example, how can we ever be certain we have measured all relevant factors?), but it is an approach we often will have to make do with, and it is the approach taken in this paper.

Now to some results. There was no clear influence of agriculture on water chemistry, but the total number of aquatic insects was greater in streams with extensive terraced fields. Why this might be is unclear. The abundance of most of the 17 species of river birds was strongly related to altitude (more abundant at lower altitudes). After statistically correcting for this effect, and the effects of stream characteristics (stream width, water flow, vegetation, etc.), there was little direct influence of agriculture on bird abundance. Only grey wagtails seemed to be affected by agriculture—there were more wagtails in streams with intensive cultivation!

The authors tentatively conclude that the effects of agriculture on river bird abundance are modest. They suggest that the strong influence of altitude may have overwhelmed the effect of agriculture, and that this effect may only be critical outside the winter. An important point is that many of the non-agricultural sites surveyed were also disturbed (by, for example, grazing by livestock). Perhaps an analysis comparing pristine streams with agricultural streams is needed. Another caveat is that highly modified landscapes like the Kathmandu valley were not surveyed—previous work has shown that in rivers around Kathmandu, forktails and redstarts are indeed rarer than in adjacent forested streams. Although the results with respect to land

use remain unclear, this and other papers by these authors provide detailed information on habitat associations of an important group of less-studied birds.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follows Manakadan & Pittie (2001). Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Buceros* 6(1): i-ix, 1-38. Unless specified, all observations are for 2001. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Kandukur Tank

20.i (VS): BLACK-NECKED STORK 1.

EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT

KOTIPALLI TO YANAM (10km downstream on Gowthami River)

30.xii.2001 (VVR, KMR): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 5,000; BLACK STORK 3; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 51; BRAHMINY SHELDUCK 1,145; NORTHERN PINTAIL 10,540; EURASIAN CURLEW 92.

KOTIPALLI TO KORIMILLI (10km upstread on Gowthami River)

31.xii.2001 (VVR, KMR): BAR-HEADED GOOSE 48; BRAHMINY SHELDUCK 600.

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu

24.i (KMR): SPOT-BILLED PELICAN* VU 240, CB, 96 active N; PAINTED STORK* NT 374, CB, 154 active N; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS* NT 500.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Nandyal Tank

24.xii.2001 (CS, BS): MALLARD 18.

Pavumanchula

23.xii.2001 (CS, BS): MALLARD 20.

Sangameswar Backwaters

23.xii.2001 (CS, BS): INDIAN SHAG 400+; LITTLE EGRET 77,000; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 1800+; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS 2000+; BLACK IBIS 5000+; GLOSSY IBIS 2800+; SPOONBILL 12; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 700+; BRAHMINY SHELDUCK 150+; COMMON SHELDUCK 50+; COMB DUCK 200+; NORTHERN PINTAIL 5000+; SPOT-BILLED DUCK 3000+; MALLARD 200+; GARGANEY 5,000+; SHOVELLER 2000+; TUFTED POCHARD 3000+; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 5000+; LITTLE STINT 10,000+; TEMMINCK'S STINT 6000+; BLACK-BELLIED TERN* NT 6; INDIAN SKIMMER 2.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Daulatabad

26.i (RP, KK): PAINTED STORK* NT 10; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 200; COTTON TEAL 1130; COMMON COOT 3500.

Jatprole

30.xii.2001 (KHK): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS* NT 10.

MEDAK DISTRICT

Toopran

21.i (PR, R): LONG-BILLED VULTURE* CR, CB 2 N with birds incubating, 2 N empty. A pair seen mating; BONELLI'S EAGLE 1 imm; PAINTED SPURFOWL 1; EURASIAN EAGLE-OWL CB, 1 pair with 1 imm.

Singoor

17.xii.2001 (MSK): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS* NT 14; GLOSSY IBIS 100; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 50; COMB DUCK 22; UNIDENTIFIED DUCKS 7,000; COMMON COOT 2,340.

NALGONDA DISTRICT

Kodad Tank

23-24.xii.2001 (HT, KS): ASIAN PIED STARLING 5.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Nadargul

30.xii.2001 (HT, HJ): LAGGAR 1 imm. M.

SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT

Naupada Swamps

4.xi.2001 (KMR): UNIDENTIFIED DUCKS 12,000; GREY-HEADED LAPWING 2.

12.i (KMR): SPOT-BILLED PELICAN* VU 9; PAINTED STORK* NT 18; UNIDENTIFIED WADERS 6,000; PIED MYNA 60.

Telineelapuram

11.i (KMR): SPOT-BILLED PELICAN* VU, 240, CB 94 active N; PAINTED STORK* NT, 454, CB 182 active N.

Telukunchi

1.xi.2001 (KMR): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 6,000.

VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Borra Caves

13.ii (RM): Yellow-browed Bulbul (Shivalingapuram Village).

Chintapalli

14.ii (RM): GREAT PIED HORNBILL; COMMON HILL MYNA; EURASIAN BLACKBIRD.

Gudem

14.ii (RM): ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL; COMMON HILL MYNA; EURASIAN BLACKBIRD.

Kondakarla Lake

13.ii (RM): OPEN-BILLED STORK 5,000+ in typha; COTTON TEAL 3,000+; BLUE-BREADED RAIL 8 very confiding; BAILLON'S CRAKE 5; PURPLE MOORHEN 2,000+; COMMON MOORHEN 1,218+; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 326+; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA 459+; BLACK-TAILED GODWIT 78; LITTLE STINT 3,500+ in flocks of 500+; DUNLIN 7; RUFF 500+; GULL-BILLED TERN 359.

Sileru

14.ii (RM): HILL MYNA; BLACKBIRD.

VIZIANAGARAM DISTRICT

Thattipudi Reservoir, Gosthani River

11-13.ii (RM): GREAT CRESTED GREBE 20, in pairs; LARGE WHISTLING-DUCK 415; LESSER WHISTLING-DUCK 1838; GADWALL 230; EURASIAN WIGEON 354; SPOT-BILLED DUCK 458; NORTHERN PINTAIL 2540; GARGANEY 2730; COMMON TEAL 2820; RED-CRESTED POCHARD 112; COMMON POCHARD 318; TUFTED POCHARD 1608; BAER'S POCHARD VU* 20; MASKED FINFOOT VU* 2.

DELHI

Okhla and surrounding areas

2.ii (ND, others): BLACK-HEADED GULL 3,000.

9.ii (NSK, TR, MV): NORTHERN SHOVELER c. 5,000; COOT c. 1,000.

24.ii (KBS): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK c. 20; GREYLAG GOOSE c. 400; NORTHERN SHOVELER c. 9,000; COMMON COOT c. 1,000.

Prithvi Raj Road

11.ii (KBS): INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 27 on trees.

Tughlaqabad

3.ii (ND, others): BLUE ROCK-THRUSH 1.

Yamuna (Timarpur)

18.ii (SCS, RA): COMMON COOT c. 5,000; WHITE-TAILED STONECHAT PRB, 1 M with N-mat.

HARYANA**GURGAON DISTRICT****Basai Wetland**

24.ii (BG, BH, others): PAINTED STORK NT* 24 in flt; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 20; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 4; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 2 imm.; COMMON CRANE 80+; WHITE-TAILED LAPWING c. 50; RUFF c. 500.

PANCHKULA**Morni Hills (a proposed Wildlife Sanctuary)**19-20.i (SCS): BEARDED VULTURE 3 OH, uncommon; INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE CR* c. 20 OH; HIMALAYAN GRIFFON c. 15 OH; EURASIAN GRIFFON c. 15 OH; RED-HEADED VULTURE NT* 1 OH; BLACK EAGLE 1 OH, uncommon; GOLDEN EAGLE 4 with 2 juv., OH, uncommon; GREAT BARBET 1; BLUE-THROATED BARBET 1; WHITE-TAILED NUTHATCH 1 uncommon; RUFOUS-BREASTED ACCENTOR uncommon; FIRE-TAILED SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm., feeding on Bottle-brush flowers (new for Haryana); RED-BILLED BLUE MAGPIE several sightings of 1-6 birds (2nd record for Haryana); GREY TREEPIE 2+2 (1st record for Haryana?).

9-10.ii (SS, AS): WHITE-BACKED VULTURE CR* 6; HIMALAYAN GRIFFON 20+; RED-HEADED VULTURE NT* 1; NORTHERN GOSHAWK 1, uncommon.

PANIPAT DISTRICT**Panipat Refinery**

16.ii (SCS, NSK, AV, N): GREAT CRESTED GREBE 4, 2 in br., plm.; DARTER NT* 5; PAINTED STORK NT* 12 in flt; FERRUGINOUS POCHARD NT* 2.

SONIPAT DISTRICT**Delhi Canal (Rohat-Harsana Minor stretch)**

17.ii (SCS, RA): PAINTED STORK NT* 3+2+1+1; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* a pair; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 8+; BOOTED EAGLE 1 black & 1 pale morph; SARUS CRANE CR* 3+2;

SIND SPARROW 20+ a few feeding on Eucalyptus flowers. A M and a F entered an old N of Baya Weaver Bird and came out of it.

23.ii (SCS, SM, MA, ND, VKG, others): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* c. 20; BLACK IBIS c. 20; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 2+2 in flt; BOOTED EAGLE 1 black & 1 pale morph; SARUS CRANE NT* 4+3; SIND SPARROW 1+3+5+4.

Mohamedabad Marshes

3.ii (SCS): GREAT CORMORANT 900+ roosting on Eucalyptus trees; SARUS CRANE NT* 3 (1 sub-ad.) + 2 + 4 (2 sub-ad.); FERRUGINOUS POCHARD NT* 16.

Rohat Village

18.i (SCS, SM): BROWN SHRIKE 1 ad., (uncommon).

Sonipat Town

3.ii (SCS): 1 SHIKRA picked up an ad., F ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN from lawn.

KERALA**IDUKKI DISTRICT****Periyar National Park**

12.iii (CTH): GREAT CORMORANT CB, imm., on N on dead tree in reservoir; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD PRB, N under const., in dead Bougainvillea; HOUSE CROW CB, ad., feeding feathered yng., on N.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aanchal Sondhi (AS); Anchumal Verma (AV); Bikram Grewal (BG); Bill Harvey (BH); C. Tom Hash (CTH); Humayun Taher (HT); Hyder Jafer (HJ); K. Kalyani (KK); K. Srinivas (KS); Kiran Katikaneni (KiK); Kunwar B. Singh (KBS); M.S. Kulkarni (MSK); Manoj Vishwanathan (MV); Mohit Agarwal (MA); N. Shiva Kumar (NSK); Nikhil Devasar (ND); Noorana (N); Pranay Rao (PR); R. Padmawathe (RP); Raajeev Mathew (RM); Raffael Aye (RA); Ramesh (R); Sanjay Sondhi (SS); Suresh C. Sharma (SCS); Tarun Roy (TR); V.K. Gupta (VKG).

EDITORS' COMMENT: The "Delhi" portion of "Birding Notes" published in *Pitta* #129 January 2002 (p. 6) were inadvertently repeated in *Pitta* #130 February 2002 (pp. 7-8). The error is regretted.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

Cachinnans Corner

"The company I used to work for was located in a large building with a lot of meeting rooms; each of which was named after a different bird. There was *Sparrow* and *Swallow* on the first floor, *Hawk* and *Harrier* on the second floor and so on. When the company introduced its no-smoking policy, a small area was erected outside the back door to provide a place for the employees to light up. After a few days, an unofficial nameplate appeared on its door. It read *Puffin*." [Contributed by M. Shafaat Ulla. *Source:* John Harrison in *Reader's Digest*, January 2002.]

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A. Taher (6612608) **Website:** <http://www.bsaponline.org> **E-mail:** aasheesh@vsnl.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IP TTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 132-133: April-May 2002

PROGRAMME

Indexed 3/X/2003

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 19-v-2002: Nehru Zoological Park: Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am and assemble near the ticket counter. Carry water and snacks as this will be a half day trip. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads at 6.15am. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 20-v-2002, 6pm: Talk and video by Humayun Taher on nesting of raptors in Anantgiri, Vikarabad. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Secunderabad Club Meeting on Wildlife

The Secunderabad Club is organizing their next 'Coffee Table' meeting on Saturday, 18.v.2002 from 6pm—7.30pm. The topic is Wildlife and Nature and there will be an audio-visual by Mr Amruth Dhanwatay, wildlife photographer and, a Honrary Wildlife Warden of Maharashtra. Invitation is open (but limited) to members of the BSAP. Those desirous of attending should confirm to Aasheesh Pittie (6551961) at least 2 days in advance.

BSAP Camps

The BSAP has been organising half-day or one-day outings for bird watching once every month, to areas in and around Hyderabad. We feel that there are excellent birding habitats in other parts of Andhra Pradesh where members could go and observe various species of birds that are not normally found near home. With this in view we had organised a 3-day trip to Horsley Hills (Chittoor District) in November 2001, for which there was an enthusiastic response from Hyderabad, Chennai and Bangalore.

We have now decided to organise 2-day / 3-day trips to various locations in A.P. 6-8 locations have been short-listed with plans to organise trips throughout the year. The plan is to make these a regular feature. These 'packaged birding-tours' will include to-and-fro and local transport, boarding, lodging, etc. Such group-travel will not only be a lot of fun but also light on the purse. Trips will be organised judiciously around weekends and holidays. We request your cooperation and participation in making these excursions a success.

To start with, we are planning a 2-day (Saturday-Sunday) trip to Farahabad in Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve in the 2nd half of July 2002. Details are yet to be worked out but as always, participation will be on first-come-first-served basis. It will also be 'limited' depending upon transport and boarding facilities. Those of you interested in

joining should call Shafaat Ulla (3353098, before 9am or after 6pm) in the 1st week of July.

BSAP Project: Monitoring Bustard Population

The Society has been awarded a 2-year project by the Bombay Natural History Society, under the aegis of the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN), to **Monitor Bustard population and habitat in Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary and to determine the cause for their decline.** This study requires bi-monthly visits of 3 days each, to the sanctuary, and has been designed in a way that amateurs can easily contribute. *Here's our chance to do something for the birds and their habitat.* Volunteers are requested to contact Aasheesh Pittie (6551961) for further details. Your early response is required as the project is slated to begin in June / July 2002.

The plight of the Jerdon's Courser

P. Jegannath (of the BNHS), studying the ecology of the Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilos bitorquatus*, reports that a "large part (c. 260Ha) of the scrub jungle in and around Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary was cleared between February-March 2002. 60Ha of potentially suitable courser habitat was cleared within sanctuary limits. The clearance is to provide land for agriculture and to those displaced by floods. This area is about 2km from Reddipalli, the main entrance to the sanctuary and within 1km of a confirmed courser site. From 20-23 April 2002, 2.5m x 2m trenches, ranging from 10m to 455m in length, were dug inside the Sanctuary, close to the watch-tower. They start from near the boundary of the sanctuary and are 1km from Reddipalli. Stones and soil were dug up and piled next to the trench. Trees and shrubs, in the path of the trenches, were uprooted and flung aside. All these trenches have been dug in places where we have got recent authentic records of the Jerdon's Courser."

The Forest Department of Andhra Pradesh apparently had no inkling about these things! As far as we know, they could not do anything about the clearance of land, as they were not sure of the exact location. When we heard about the trenches, Mr Hitesh Malhotra, Chief Wildlife Warden was informed immediately and confirmed the next day that the work has been stopped. It is inexplicable how a government department, entrusted with one of the rarest avian species on earth, can become so criminally careless in its duty. [Editors.]

Hen Harriers hunt in un-managed grasslands

A PhD study at Aberdeen University has found out that the 20-year decline in the breeding population of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* on Orkney (UK) seems to be a result of food shortage during the early breeding period. Males that provide plenty of food during the pre-laying period are more likely to have a breeding female. And more food increases the chances of hatching young. Providing extra food even increased the number of breeding females. *The study has also found that male harriers hunt in unmanaged grassland—which has declined over the same period as the harriers* [emphasis—editors]. The result of this study is relevant to India and her grasslands too. [*Birds* 18(8): 63 (Winter 2001)].

Long arm of the law

The Jourdain Society, whose members include several convicted egg collectors, was subject to a high profile investigation by the Wiltshire police and the RSPB in 1994. Six individuals were subsequently convicted of offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Following an RSPB complaint to the Charities Commission, the Jourdain Society has now relinquished its charitable status. [*Birds* 18(8): 64 (Winter 2001)].

The Dodo's kin

The Dodo vanished from the Earth more than 500 years ago, but its closest relative survives—in India's Nicobar Islands. A genetic study by Oxford University scientists Beth Shapiro and Alan Cooper has shown that the Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica* is the closest living relative of the Dodo. This helps biologists place the Dodo in the avian tree, something they have long wondered about. Shapiro and Cooper examined genes of 37 species of birds in the penguin family, besides genetic material from skulls of the Dodo preserved in the Oxford museum. Their findings were published recently in *Science*. [Contributed by Shafaat Ulla, from *India Today* 8.4.2002].

IBCN Coordinator

Farah Ishtiaq, the Coordinator of the Indian Bird Conservation Network, has resigned to pursue further higher studies in America. She was at the helm of IBCN affairs right from its inception and played a major role in making it what it is today. As an IBCN Partner, our Society benefited from her constant support. We wish her all the best for the future.

Request for Information: Parasitic cuckoos of South Asia and their hosts

Suhel Quader

"I am carrying out a survey of some parasitic cuckoos and their host species. We know surprisingly little about the distribution and abundance of cuckoos and their hosts in South Asia despite there being a fair amount of information on their natural history. With this survey, I hope to collate existing information on these species and make the combined information available to others.

If you are familiar with the avifauna of an area (e.g., your neighbourhood, a college campus, or a national park you have visited several times), you can help with this effort. If you have only seen a few cuckoos (or even none), your response will still be useful - the absence of a species is often as interesting as its presence.

This questionnaire <<http://www.zoo.ufl.edu/suhelq/cuckoo/>> is an experiment of sorts. The Internet has made the sharing of information very easy in principle. I believe that birdwatchers throughout the Indian subcontinent, amateurs and professionals alike, can make important contributions to the natural history of South Asia by sharing their observations. Are we willing to do so? The response to this questionnaire may hint at the answer.

The web version of this questionnaire should make it relatively easy for you to fill in the information required. If you would rather fill out this form in an alternative format, please email me and let me know.

I welcome any suggestions you may have about improving this questionnaire. Please email me with comments. The information collected will be freely available. Please let me know if you would like to receive a summary of responses. All contributors will be gratefully acknowledged.

Many thanks for your time and effort in helping with this! [E-mail: suhelq@grove.ufl.edu. Department of Zoology, PO Box 118525, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA.]

Outline of questionnaire: The most valuable information will come from locations that you are familiar with (i.e., have visited more than four times over the past two years, or the immediate vicinity of your home).

Cuckoo species of particular interest to me are the Pied Crested (or Jacobin) Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, the Common Hawk Cuckoo (or Brainfever Bird) *Cuculus varius*, and the Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*. The primary hosts of the first two cuckoos are *Turdoides* babblers and of the Koel are the House and Jungle Crows. If you do not have time to give information about all cuckoos and hosts, I would still appreciate receiving information about these particular species.

For each location for which you submit information, I would like:

Some location information (Name of location; District; State; Country, nearest town; distance to nearest town; land use; habitat type).

Birding effort (Number of visits you have made to this location in the last two years; time spent birding per visit).

Cuckoos (Species, months you have seen or heard them at this location, subjective abundance).

Potential hosts (Species; months you have seen or heard them; months during which you have evidence of breeding; subjective abundance).

Review: Calls of Indian Birds. Vol. II

Lt. General Baljit Singh

Strictly, this is neither a review nor a critique but fulsome praise of the two among one billion plus Indians who have chosen to harness their exceptional talents and unwavering dedication to record the songs and or calls of at least 600 of the over 1,200 species of India's birds. Their maiden venture covered 58 bird species (see *Pitta* # 125 Sep. 2001, page 1). Good renderings of bird calls apart, their venture was also a marvel in improvisation; Mr. Snehal Patel now lets me into his secret, "I made one dish out of a cooking vessel, parabolic in shape and fitted a hearing-aid microphone. An AIWA walkman was the recording instrument." I salute them.

Nature Club Surat* have now on offer their latest cassette (Vol.II) covering another 59 species of our birds from varied habitats. An NRI who had chanced to listen to Vol.I, spontaneously gifted them one state-of-the-art "dish". So naturally Vol.II is a very superior aural experience.

All 59 recordings are of excellent uniform quality and the auditory effect of each has that true-to-life, authentic ring. In enhancing the audio frequency of the call of a tiny object like a bird the background mush will creep in. It is so with 15 recordings but is so well managed that in some it is no more than the muffled rumble of the ocean from afar and in some others, like the smooth hiss of steady rain. All together the cassette is irresistible.

Of the many merits of this cassette the first is that most calls are played up to 50 secs., each and non less than 30 secs. This helps in memory imprinting. In the case of Herons, Owls, Drongos, Doves and Bulbuls upto four species of each family are covered in separate clusters. This allows comprehension and assimilation of the variations in call notes within a family. This is particularly interesting when the calls of the Crested Hawk Eagle and the Crested Serpant Eagle are played out one after the other. Similar is the case with the Siberian and the Black-necked Cranes, and some Cuckoos, Babblers and Flycatchers.

I have replayed the tape so many times that the household is ready to revolt! Yet, I am unable to single out one or two best bird calls recorded. The calls of the Pheasant-Tailed Jacana are very impressive. You get to hear all the call notes mentioned by Kazmierczak and a few more. A Rain Quail surprises you with the precocious pitch of her call. The velvet smooth flow of the yoddlle of the Indian Cuckoo has a sensual touch and makes a soothing lullaby. The Hoopoe demands your full attention. For the dramatic effect the super fast staccato drumming by the Black Woodpecker spaced

with vocal calls is unforgettable. The call of the Indian Pitta vindicates my own transcription of his vocalization as "Sweet-tree....sweet-tree." The Rufous-backed Shrike is so merry that he seems unstoppable. The complaining-lamenting tone of the Babblers is highly amusing. The Racket-tailed Drongo leaves you dazzled with his rich repertoire. (I suspect this is the producer's favourite as the bird figures on the paper-jacket of the cassette). In sheer indiscretion, I am tempted to say that the delicate fluty calls and song of the Singing Bush Lark and the Crested Lark send the heart a flutter as nothing else does.

Small-scale enterprises, that have no bias for commerce, must be the most hurtful. Now take the first edition of 1000 cassette of Vol.I; only 400 have sold so far in over a year. What will happen to Vol.II? The authors are half way through the compilation of Vol. III. Where are India's philanthropists and the legions of bird-watchers? Let each of us buy one of each vol., and also gift at least one of each to friends. For the past few years, only one pair of Siberian Cranes has visited India. A few years hence none may be seen at all. So these tapes are a cultural investment for your children to listen to the beautiful voices of innocence from India's feathered creatures.

*The cassette, together with an attractive booklet, is for Rs.160/- by DD from Nature Club Surat, 81, Sarjan Society, Behind Modi Bungalow, Athwalines, Surat 395007.

IBCN & IBA News

Bombay Natural History Society, which is the India Partner of BirdLife International, has supported 24 Important Bird Area surveys during 1999-2000. Funding to the tune of Rs. 11.5 lakhs was disbursed during this period. 9 projects have been completed and their reports submitted while the rest are still under way. 16 of these projects are in NE India, that region being a biodiversity hotspot. A further 5 projects are under consideration with an estimated outlay of Rs. 2.5 lakhs. [compiled from *Mistnet* 3(1): 4-5.]

Do you want a TBA CD?

The mammoth 2-volume (pp. 3000+, £55/-) publication of BirdLife International, *Threatened Birds of Asia*, is now available, in its entirety, on a CD Rom from the IBCN office at BNHS for Rs.100/- only! That this is a bargain is a gross understatement. For a copy of the CD, please send Demand Drafts of Rs.100/- to The Director, BNHS, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400023.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-51

"...Hartert had hoped for a reform of systematics, ever since he had catalogued the Senckenberg collection. But when Seebohm died in 1895, Hartert was the only remaining European who wished to arrange the classification of forms according to the theory of evolution. Everyone in England totally rejected the use of trinomial nomenclature; in Germany it had begun to be employed eccentrically in opposition to Hartert's main ideas.

These he had defined in detail in 1891, when he wrote:

I agree with Seebohm, who views subspecies as forms in the process of development. Seebohm wishes to have called as species all forms that are not interrelated with other forms, and as subspecies all those that are related by a series of intermediate forms. That this expresses the nature of subspecies in a scientific manner I do not doubt, but I object to taking it as a definition...I believe that it is right to regard as subspecies forms that differ only in a small variation in size, lighter or darker coloring, or small

variations in pattern, even though one does not have the intermediate forms at hand. This type of nomenclature shows the closeness of the relationship, whereas the simple specific name gives no indication whether the species are poles apart or very nearly related.

The bold and significant step had been taken; Hartert had dropped the American leading strings. 'Intergradation' had been replaced by generalizing induction, the 'judgement trained by practice.' But at first there was no sign of agreement... To strangle it, he went home in 1897 and (after buying Brehm's collection in Renthendorf) took part in the twenty-first annual meeting of the Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft at Dresden where Berlepsch (now a count) was to give a lecture on May 29 about the concept of subspecies.

Three speakers appeared against Hartert—Berlepsch, Wieglesworth, and Kleinschmidt—each representing a different opinion. Berlepsch objected that Hartert's procedure would burden nomenclature with hypotheses. 'We are still completely uncertain about the development of species, and therefore should not introduce our guesses into nomenclature.' **Hartert, using trinomial nomenclature, had recently been lumping species together** [emphasis mine—K.G.]. But Nature herself knows no lumping, and produces species only side by side. Therefore the rules laid down in 1891 should be followed; they prescribed that part of a species may be classed as a subspecies because it possesses diagnostic characteristics less striking than those of clearly distinguishable species. **Thus subspecies are entirely the same as species except that they are less easy to recognize and distinguish** [emphasis mine—K.G.]. It should be a main principle in nomenclature to adopt solely practical points of view in solving problems."

"...It became evident that Reichenow, the most influential German ornithologist because of his position as editor of the *Journal für Ornithologie*, had accepted Berlepsch's 'practical' view. After he had already let this be understood several times, he declared categorically in 1901: 'We must turn back! **The species must remain what it was until now, the smallest indivisible unit in the system, the essence of an individual being. It must not become a concept for a systematic group** [emphasis mine—K.G.]. Therefore we must not rank a subspecies below a species, but regard it as a conspecies, an aberration, or an inferior species.'"

"In the meantime, Hartert had given a more precise form to his principles of nomenclature. Stimulated by Kleinschmidt's publications, he had stressed in 1901 that geographic distribution was decisive in establishing whether two very similar forms should be treated as subspecies or as separate species. That had been demonstrated recently by the examples of the marsh and willow tits (*Parus palustris* and *salicarius*, Kleinschmidt, 1897 [*Journal für Ornithologie* 45: 112-137—K. G.] and the North African crested and thekla larks (*Galerida cristata* and *theklae*, Erlanger, 1899 [*J. für Ornithol.* 47: 324-352—K.G.]). In accordance with this principle Hartert gave a definition of subspecies in the introduction to his great work, *Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna* (1903):

We describe as subspecies the geographically separated forms of one and the same type, which taken together make up a species. Therefore not just a small number of differences, but differences combined with geographic separation, permit us to determine a form as a subspecies, naturally when there is general agreement of the main characters.

This was indeed a pioneer book not only because Hartert collected in it the sum total of knowledge about birds in the entire palearctic [*sic!*—K. G.] region, but also because the first part, published in November 1903, at the same time ensured the triumph of trinomialism. Hartert's group felt so strong by then that Hellmayr openly recommended the 'rooting out' of the opposition.

On that principle all the contemporary British Ornithologists would have had to be rooted out. No one in the British Isles dared to advocate trinomialism because the powerful P.L. Sclater, who had been accustomed for decades to set his imprimatur on English ornithological work, had a low opinion of all innovators. He was still editing the *Ibis*, as he had been doing since 1859, and dispensing his judgment of the performances of the world literature. Of Hartert's new work he said in 1904:

But the main point of the book is that the author calls upon us virtually to give up the binomial system, which has been in universal use since its foundation by Linnaeus, for a trinomial system. Here we most decidedly decline to follow him... We shall, no doubt, be stigmatized by some of our friends as 'fossils' and 'antediluvians'; but we believe that the great majority of sober-minded ornithologists, in spite of the efforts of the new school, will stick to the binomial system.

Sharpe hoped so too. On August 24, 1909, a few months before his death, he wrote:

My views on this subject have often been stated, as for trinomials, I look upon the system as destructive. I consider that the burden imposed upon the Zoologists who follow this method for the naming of their specimens will become too heavy, and the system will fall by its own weight. That races or sub-species of birds exist in nature, no one can deny, but, to my mind, a binomial title answers every purpose.

Therefore in his *Hand-list* he promoted all previously described subspecies to the rank of species, reaching the enormous total of 18,939 species of birds." [Erwin Stresemann, 1975, *Ornithology. From Aristotle to the Present*, pp. 258-263, 267.]

Subspecies, or what were called "races" by bird students in the 20th Century, caused the conversion of hitherto stable species limit understanding into total confusion, and introduced a hierarchical system of nomenclature, created much doubt and taxonomic "double standards." Hugh Whistler (1931, *JBNHS* 31: 189-195) had aptly brought up the danger of such uncertainty, and doubt, in our sub-continent and his point should be understood by all of us now, to prevent further "guesswork" with our species recognition and names, leading to wrong attribution of biological data to misidentified species!

In my first 50 Letters I have projected the history of Indian Ornithology as I see it, tried to clarify matters of interest to bird watchers eager to know and to learn, and summarized the present situation with our avifauna's databases. This new millenium needs novel approaches—a serious look back at bird studies over the past 300+ years and a fresh focus on “reality” through re-search of past scholarship discussed in the writings of great ornithologists who have come and gone but left their “footprints in the sands of time” for us to rediscover and properly analyse. The last century also saw the unfortunate establishment of a “subspecies concept” in birds (and butterflies) which introduced doubt and confusion and also what I can best exemplify as a “Caste System.” Good species were supposed to be only those which were easy to separate from related ones (e.g., in Ducks, Storks and Redstarts, etc.) and those where diagnostic differences were difficult or exasperating were conveniently placed in a “lower caste”—the subspecies. If reference is made to works on our birds, from the best summary in the OLD FAUNA of Oates & Blanford (1889-1898) and earlier, it will be noticed that these early birders, who had much personal experience of our bird species in the field, had separated even poorly diagnosable taxa as good species, at a time when “addiction” to the racial category had not yet gained control of ornithologists worldwide.

In later works where an “evolutionary concept” was hailed as the reason for a trinomial name—subspecies—in order to express phylogenetic relationships, from Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA (1922-1930), I see “citation inbreeding” (based on earlier summaries, not on original databases, be they type specimens, original descriptions or fresh field observations) and utter confusion! Scholarly “scientific” papers by modern researchers like Per Alström, Edward Dickinson, Siegfried Eck, Jochem Martens, Pamela Rasmussen, Philip Round, Frank Rozendaal and others, in extremely detailed works using vocalization sonograms, measurements, tables, maps, coloured illustrations, cytochrome sequences, scatter plot diagrams, consensus trees, verse syntax, and what not (but rarely using biogeography or life-cycles), completely bamboozle me, honestly! These serious “revisions or reviews” of our species taxa by overwhelmingly “extralimital” ornithologists who have perhaps inadequate field familiarity with our birds and have not acquired experiences over decades of residence here in our south Asian countries (like Brian Hodgson to Allan Hume, and even Stuart Baker to Hugh Whistler, did have) are laboured attempts at what should be instinctive “recognition” of Indian sub-continent avifaunal taxa, which “expertise” can only come with personal first-hand experience of the “character” of each distinctly evolved species and of the “pattern” of bird-life in this sub-continent, through understanding of its biogeography and geological history, its climate and the flora and fauna that make up the different ecosystems and their niches that each species has adapted to over millenia of evolutionary time. As a taxonomist I had also proceeded with confusion and adoption of a “methodology” thrust upon me by Science and seniors (in my younger years) in the same manner as these bird students named above are now doing. How does the female of a reproductively isolated species recognize its male who can mate with her and help her produce fertile offspring? Or how does one recognize the footsteps of a familiar family member or friend approaching even if the person is still out of sight? And how does an experienced field ornithologist learn to recognize (not “identify”) each of our jaçanas or crested larks from each other by just a swift glance, or even “by ear”? Not by “characters” in papers or books but through familiarity in life.

The one major flaw in our ornithological history has been the over-ambitious treatment of our entire subcontinent's avifauna in periodical summaries, brought out as Faunas, Handbooks or Guides. And Dickinson, Dekker *et al.* (European ornithologists now engaged in a long needed, worthwhile series of “Systematic Notes on Asian Birds” in the Zoologische Verhandlungen published from Leiden, Holland) now go one step “bolder” in attempting a “mightier” tome (*a la* Gould), writing about and illustrating all of the “Birds of Asia,” the earth's largest continent, even if with the cooperation of several regional specialists! Like Hugh Whistler and his earlier British bretheren, familiar with their “British Indian Empire” understood very well, this sub-continent of ours is an extremely huge and diverse geographical area with several sub-areas and sub-sub-areas of individual “character and pattern.” The birds of the island of Ceylon are perhaps the best understood and analysed avifauna of all our sub-areas. But, unless we research other areas north of it in Peninsular India, the Central Highlands, the Himalayas, and Assam—Burma, as well as the Plains of the Indus and the Ganges, and the Baluchistan—Karakoram mountains, individually, comprehension of the “whole” and acquisition of a holistic idea of “pattern and character,” and reality, will be difficult.

The other gargantuan folly relating to bird studies in our sub-continent has been the targeting of political regions to document our local bird faunas. “New” records of a bird species occurring in another State or District means nothing, but the recent discovery by Raajeev Mathew (of our Society) of a Laughing-Thrush on the Anaimalais and the Nelliampathies (in Kerala) identified by him as a species which is restricted only to the Nilgiris and Wynaad, north of the Palghat Gap, is something highly significant. What is this Laughing-Thrush? Is it Davison's, known only from its type-specimens?

My decades of field work, watching birds and collecting insects mainly, plus not just listing but imbibing published databases on our birds, using the technical academic training received make me now “see” and recognize several currently “appointed” subspecies as good species. I do not see just one Jungle Crow or Greater Coucal (Crow-Pheasant) species here but several, with individual life-cycles, inhabiting distinct ranges of their own. We need to carefully “dissect” and correctly diagnose our ioras, white-eyes, munias, tailor birds, bulbuls and babblers, etc., just like the “*Phylloscopi*” (willow/leaf warblers) have been worked in detail, and like the Gold-spectacled Flycatcher-Warbler (*Seicercus burkii*) is now being minutely examined. My “OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF BUCEROS,” to be published in my Humea, Field Ornithology, will highlight the danger of relying only on past or present “summaries,” as Whistler had warned 72 years ago, and my “Systematic Notes on Indian sub-continent Ornithology” will attempt to explain why I believe we have more than 2000, and the world probably close to 20,000, good species and not just 1300+ or some 9,500 only, as presently documented.

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RESEARCH REVIEW: Status and behaviour of the Nicobar Megapode

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Sankaran, R. 1995. The distribution, status and conservation of the Nicobar Megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis*. *Biological Conservation*. 72:17-25.

Sankaran, R. and Sivakumar, K. 1999. Preliminary results of an ongoing study of the Nicobar megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis* Blyth. *Zoologische Verhandelingen (Leiden)*. 327: 75-90.

The megapodes are exceedingly strange birds. They bury their eggs in mounds of soil, just as the closest living relatives of birds—the crocodiles—do. Depending on the species, heat for incubation comes from solar radiation, rotting leaves, or volcanic activity. Parental care after hatching is virtually non-existent, and the chicks are sometimes called “super-precocial”. Megapodes are scattered over the Australasian region. The western-most species is the Nicobar Megapode, which is endemic to the Nicobar Islands in India. What do we know about the behaviour and conservation status of this species? Thanks to Ravi Sankaran and Kuppusamy Sivakumar, of the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, valuable information is starting to trickle in.

Two surveys of the Nicobar Islands between 1992 and 1994 indicated that the status of this megapode was not as bleak as had previously been supposed. Because nest-mounds are easier to find in the forest than the birds themselves (and because mounds represent breeding birds), Sankaran surveyed strips of coastal habitat, where these mounds are usually found. He censused 17 islands, covering 100% of the coast of small islets and sampling parts of the coast of larger islands. He obtained evidence of megapode presence from 15 islands, and found a total of 214 active mounds. Extrapolating to the total available habitat yields an estimate of 1161 active mounds. Other work has indicated that two or more pairs may use a mound (R. Dekker 1992, unpublished report). Thus, one arrives at a minimum estimate of approximately 4500 breeding birds (and possibly as high as 8000). Threats from hunting, egg-collection, and predation by non-native species (like cats and dogs) appear low. Instead, habitat loss seems to be the biggest problem for the continued survival of this species.

In a following study (initiated in 1996), Sankaran and Sivakumar investigated nest-mounds and social behavior in more detail at the southern tip of Great Nicobar Island. They conclude that heat for incubation seems to be generated largely through decomposition of organic material by microbes. Overall hatching success was 77% (of 66 eggs monitored). On average, between two and three pairs used each mound (calculated from 29 mounds). Based on observations of colour-marked individuals, Sankaran and Sivakumar found that megapodes are strongly territorial, with home ranges overlapping where a mound is located. Pairs fight for access to nest mounds, but partners can be changed within and between seasons.

These wonderful and bizarre birds are still vulnerable to extinction in the long-term. Sankaran concludes his paper by stressing the need for continual monitoring of their status; certainly a crucial activity for all threatened species in the Indian subcontinent.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status ** follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follows Manakadan & Pittie (2001): Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Buceros* 6(1): i-ix, 1-38. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantgiri Hills

21.iv (PR, HT, KB, KK, SAT): CRESTED SERPENT-EAGLE CB, 1 N with yng; SHIKRA PRB; CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE CB, 2 N, 1 yng., in each; YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW PRB.

DELHI

Delhi Ridge

6/7-iv (Sa): SIRKEER MALKOHA 1.

Khera / Holambi Kalan Marsh

4.IV (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT* 11; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1.

Okhla and surrounding area

9.iii (NSK, BCC): PAINTED STORK NT* 75; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 44; NORTHERN SHOVELLER c. 2,800; TUFTED POCHARD 172.

24.iii (BS): PAINTED STORK NT* 56; RED-HEADED BUNTING 3. 27.iii (SCS, NSK): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; GREATER FLAMINGO 146; BRAHMINY SHELDUCK 300+ (largest flock for the delhi region?); NORTHERN SHOVELLER c. 3,000.

Subji Mandi Railway Station

3.iv (SCS): ROSY STARLING 3.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)

Agarwaddo wetlands

24.xi.2001: BRAHMINY SHELDUCK 26.

Cumarjua canal

28.xi.2001: NIGHT HERON 2 ad., 5 juv.; OSPREY 2; PEREGRINE FALCON 3; LESSER PIED KINGFISHER 6+; COMMON

KINGFISHER C; STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER 1; WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER C; BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER 2; WHITE-COLLARED KINGFISHER 6.

Santa Cruz wetlands and paddyfields

12.xi.2001: SPOTTED REDSHANK 1; EASTERN LITTLE STINT 1; LITTLE STINT 150+; TEMMINCK'S STINT 100+; CURLEW SANDPIPER 14; BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER 3.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT (HL)

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary

25-31.xii.2001: BLACK BAZA 1 insect-hunting in canopy; HONEY BUZZARD 4; PARIAH KITE 1; BRAHMINY KITE 2; SHIKRA 1 m; CRESTED GOSHAWK 1; BESRA SPARROW-HAWK 1 m; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD-EAGLE 1; WHITEBELLIED SEA EAGLE 1 ad.; MARSH HARRIER 1 imm.; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 3+; PEREGRINE FALCON 1; GREEN IMPERIAL PIGEON 5+; STORKBILLED KINGFISHER 6+ at stream in semi-evergr.forest; BLACKCAPPED KINGFISHER 1 at stream in semi-evergr.forest; SPECKLED PICULET 1; INDIAN GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 6+ PRB; LARGER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER fairly common; HOUSE MARTIN 1 imm.; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER 1.

Curtorim tanks and wetlands

24.xii.2001: OPENBILL STORK 58; WHITE IBIS 9; GADWALL 8+; SMALL PRATINCOLE 1000+ in paddyfields; BLACKCAPPED KINGFISHER 2.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai Wetland

3.iii (DC, AC): PAINTED STORK NT* 5; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 2; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 30; BAR-HEADED GOOSE c. 200; COMMON SHELDUCK 3 (uncommon); GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 4; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 2; DEMOISELLE CRANE c. 30.

9.iii (BH, JLS): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 2; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 3; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 3; RED-HEADED FALCON 1 (uncommon); SARUS CRANE NT* 3.

31.iii (ND): BAR-HEADED GOOSE c.250; EURASIAN CURLEW 9; DUNLIN 7 (uncommon); RUFF c. 5,000.

4.iv (SCS, SM): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* c. 90; SARUS CRANE NT* 2; RUFF 7,000.

Sultanpur National Park

9.iii (BH, JLS): NORTHERN SHOVELLER c. 1,500; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 1 imm; SARUS CRANE 2; INDIAN COURSER 9; CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE 20 dust-bathing;

12.iii (DC, AC): EURASIAN GRIFFON 4; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 1.

31.iii (ND): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 PAIR; INDIAN COURSER 7; CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE 9.

5.iv (SCS, SM): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 F; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 22; BONELLI'S EAGLE 3 in flt.

PANIPAT DISTRICT

Panipat Refinery & nearby canal

10.iii (SCS): GREAT CRESTED GREBE 1 br. plm; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 20; GADWALL c. 1,000; GARGANEY c. 150; NORTHERN SHOVELLER c. 3,000; SARUS CRANE NT* 4 ad + 2 sub-ad; PURPLE MOORHEN c. 200; COMMON COOT c. 500; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 4 (uncommon); SPANISH SPARROW 5,000+; SIND SPARROW c. 50.

19.iii (SCS, N): LITTLE CORMORANT c. 400; GREAT CORMORANT c. 100; DARTER NT* 7; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1; COMB DUCK 44; NORTHERN SHOVELLER c. 3,000; GARGANEY c. 200; FERRUGINOUS POCHARD NT* 6; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 2; EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE VU* 1; COMMON COOT c. 1,000.

SONIPAT DISTRICT

JNL Feeder/DDN8 Crossing (Gohana-Rithal)

3.iii (SCS): PAINTED STORK NT* 18; LESSER KESTREL VU* 1 F; SARUS CRANE 2 ad., 1 sub-ad; SMALL BEE-EATER PRB, a large swarm digging N channels along canal; WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART 1 ad.

23.iii (AS, SCS, SS, SM): SARUS CRANE 2 ad., 1 sub-ad, + 2+2+2 ad., 1 sub-ad; WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART 1 whistling "see see"; SIND SPARROW in 2s & 3s as flocks splitting into pairs, underparts getting brighter.

Mohamedbad marshes

2.iv (SCS, SM): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 24; SARUS CRANE NT* 2+2; SIND SPARROW 6 coming into br., plm; CRESTED BUNTING 1 F (uncommon).

9.iii (SCS): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* c. 70; BLACK IBIS 150 on Eucalyptus sp., trees; GARGANEY 100+.

Yamuna river (near Baghat bridge)

24.iii (SCS): BLACK-BELLIED TERN NT* 1 in br., plm.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Girinagar

20.i (JNP): PARIAH KITE PRB, adding N-mat., to N c.9m up a Fig (*Ficus* sp.) tree.

Lalbagh

13.i (JNP): LITTLE GREBE CB, ad., with 2 yng., feeding one with a Pond-skater (Hemiptera, Gerridae); COMMON COOT CB, incubating on a floating N; WIRE-TAILED SWALLOW.

10.iii (JNP, BWFCB): COMMON MOORHEN 1 seen after a long gap; WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER feeding on a 2" long Skink (Family Scincidae); WHITE-CHEEKED BARBET PRB, mating; PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, F gathering cobwebs from Eresid Spider colony on Bottle Brush tree (*Callistemon lanceolatum*), carrying them c.10m to an indoor plants' nursery, where N was under const., c. 3m up a dangling creeper. Occasionally it brought dry leaves to patch up and decorate the cobwebs.

Vasanthnagar

12.xi.2001 (JNP): Pariah Kite PRB, mating and bringing twigs to N c. 10m up in partially opened fronds of a Coconut Palm *Cocos nucifera*. The pair mated several times in the next 4 days; 1 ad., brought food for its partner during incubation. 18.xii.2001: Both adults bringing food to yng., in N. Periodically the N was reinforced as the fronds opened. This continued up to ii.2002.

TUMKUR DISTRICT

Kaggalahalli heronry

3.ii (KRKP, KVC): GREY HERON PRB, 3 pairs const., N; PAINTED STORK CB, 40 pairs various stages of const., N on Tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indica*) while others were incubating.

UTTARA KANNADA DISTRICT

Hadinaibail

28.x.2001 (JNP): HOUSE CROW PRB, carrying N-mat.

Karwar Port

26.x.01 (JNP, TNR): PARIAH KITE picking up dead fish floating on water. PRB, carrying twig as N-mat; WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE 2; HOUSE CROW foraging for dead fish brought in by fishermen. CB, 3 N of which 2 c. 6m up a light pole. One of them had a yng bird being fed fish by an ad. Other N had an incubating bird even when the hot sun was scorching us below. The 3rd N was on a tree, with yng.

Murudeshwara

29.10.2001 (JNP): WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE.

Ramathirtha (Honnava)

28.10.2001 (JNP): LOTEN'S SUNBIRD sipping nectar from flowers of Yellow Oleander *Thevetia nerifolia* Juss.

Yana

27.10.2001 (JNP): BLUE-WINGED PARAKEET C; YELLOW-BROWED BULBUL abundant; INDIAN RUFOUS BABBLER 3 flocks; QUAKER TIT-BABBLER abundant.

KERALA**ERNAKULAM DISTRICT****Thattakkad Bird Sanctuary (KVE)**

21.ii: ORIENTAL BAY-OWL.

24.ii: CEYLON FROGMOUTH CB.

KANNUR DISTRICT**Kattampally wetlands**

24.ii (CS, BS, A, K, As): NORTHERN SHOVELLER.

KOZHIKODE DISTRICT**Akalapuzha backwater**

20.i (SM): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 500+.

MALAPPURAM DISTRICT**Bharatapuzha**

21.i (KVE): BLACK-BELLIED TERN NT*, CB, N with eggs.

THRISSUR DISTRICT**Chimmini Wildlife Sanctuary**

2.ii (POM, RH, VR, MCT, KKS): CEYLON FROGMOUTH CB, N with yng.

Kole Wetlands

1.1.2001 (MVN): GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU*.

27.i (MCT, CPS): EURASIAN SPOONBILL 1; SPOT-BILLED DUCK 16.

PUNJAB**FEROZEPUR DISTRICT****Harike Bird Sanctuary**29-31.iii (SCS, SS, AS): DARTER NT* c. 30; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 5; INDIAN SKIMMER VU* 9 over the Rajasthan Canal on 29th evening after sunset. 40 at the confluence on 30th; STRIATED BABBLER CB, ads., feeding 2 juv; LONG-TAILED PRINIA PRB, 1 bird carrying N-mat, to N 1.5' up; YELLOW-BELLIED PRINIA PRB,

many birds with N-mat; CETTI'S BUSH-WARBLE 2; EURASIAN PENDULINE-TIT 5; SPANISH SPARROW 50,000+ feeding on ripening wheat; SIND SPARROW PRB, a pair carrying acacia leaves to a N 27' up an *Acacia nilotica*, making 8 sorties in 5 minutes.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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ERRATA: In *Pitta* 131 (March 2002): p. 7, line 5 from top, under "Birding Notes" please change "...all observations are for 2001" to "2002"; p. 7, please read 'Black Stork' instead of "Black-necked Stork" from Andhra Pradesh, Chittoor District, Kandukur Tank. The errors are regretted.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

Pigeon Post**Sighting of Goliath Heron in Jharkhand**

"This is to report the sighting of Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* in Jharkhand State. It was first seen by me on 6.i.2002 and identified on the basis of its size (much bigger than the Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*) and by the black colour of its beak and legs. During the next few days I saw this same individual several times and was informed by local people that it was seen in the area even last year. This is a rare winter visitor to India and its distribution range is scanty and not well known."

—**Krishanu Bhattacharjee, Burdwan.**

Clever crows

My daughter-in-law saw a documentary (in Dubai) about how crows adapt themselves to new items on their menu in Japan. A bird of the species was not successful in opening walnuts by dropping them. So it started dropping them on the road where passing cars broke the nut. However it was difficult to retrieve the kernels due to heavy traffic. Next it began dropping them on a pedestrian crossing! No prizes here for guessing—Mr Crow collected the kernels when traffic stopped to allow pedestrians to cross the road!

—**M. Shafaat Ulla, Hyderabad.**

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

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Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 134: June 2002

PROGRAMME

Indexed 3/7/2003

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 16-vi-2002: Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park, Jubilee Hills: Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am and assemble near the ticket counter. Carry water and snacks as this will be a half-day trip. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 17-vi-2002, 6pm: Talk and video by Humayun Taher on nesting of raptors in Anantgiri, Vikarabad. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

5-vii-2002, 6pm: Talk by Dr Asad R. Rahmani, Director, Bombay Natural History Society. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Veerapuram Heronry, Anantapur District

Last evening I paid a visit to Veerapuram along with Salim Hameed of People For Animals, Bangalore (PFA). The main purpose of the visit was to rush two of the fallen nestling Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala*. We also utilized this opportunity to talk to some very interested youth who were pretty keen on starting a bird conservation group at Veerapuram. They have asked for guidance and help from bird lovers. One of them has even come forward to offer his land for erecting a fenced open-air nursery being planned by Salim for the care of fallen nestlings. The nursery should be up by the end of this week.

One of the injured birds at Veerapuram had been badly attacked by a dog and had a broken wing, beyond repair. The second one had been badly treated by a local vet and was unable to stand up.

More recently, a few of the staff from National Institute of Virology (?) had climbed on to the nesting-trees to take blood samples from nestlings, despite the protests of some village youth. One of the young birds from which they had taken blood samples, died two days later. Another chick that fell down from its nest was put back and we found it to be doing well.

According to the villagers, over the last two weeks, nearly 50 nestlings have died after falling from their nests during torrential rains.

An estimated 3,000 Painted Storks are breeding at the village now: the largest population ever in recent times. Unlike other years when only about 8 Tamarind trees *Tamarindus indus* used to be occupied, over 20 trees have been occupied for nesting this year. Five pairs of Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* built their nests in a cluster on one of the Tamarind trees during early November 2001, but abandoned them later and were not seen again. We found

that a large number of nests still have very small young (two week-olds). I am surprised that the birds have been breeding this late in the season.

We spent quite some time talking to those youngsters and they are ready to form a local conservation group, provided they are told what to do. The District Collector (DC) at Anantapur has already issued an order against tree felling. According to the youngsters, he is quite concerned about the heronry. On their own, the youngsters have persuaded the Village Panchayat to ban the use of water in the village tank for irrigation and the net effect is that the village tank still holds sufficient water. The youngsters suggested that we could do the same with eight other tanks within a radius of 5km of Veerapuram, if we can get the DC to issue an order to ban use of water for irrigation. The youth say that local people would comply with such orders.

The question of seeding the tanks in the surrounding area with fingerlings of *Tilapia* sp., also cropped up. The youngsters suggested that we could do so and then get the Collector to issue another order against fish harvest by local people. This would ensure food supply to the breeding birds. If this can be done, I am sure Andhra Pradesh will have another pelicanry to boast off.

What is needed at Veerapuram is that:

1. The village needs more attention from the authorities: Forest Department and the District Collectorate. The site should get the status of a Sanctuary and it should be part of APFD's Management of Plan for Protected Areas.
2. The site should get publicity and signboards need to be put up by the highway and rural roads giving directions to reach the village. Also, media coverage would help.
3. Schools in Anantapur and other surrounding districts should be made to take their students to the site on an educational excursion.

4. Other concerned NGOs should make regular visits to educate the villagers and also to help the local group help conserve the site.
5. Salim would be willing to take-up the care of badly injured birds at PFA facility in Bangalore and return them to Veerapuram once they are well, but he needs funds. A few of us from Bangalore and Mysore are ready to offer our time and support as well.
6. Funds are needed to get the basic conservation work going.
7. BSAP can do a lot. Having based in the State's capital, you can mobilize funds, concerned authorities and, media (newspaper and TV: both DD and private channels) to highlight the village and its birds and get NGOs to work with the local group. [S. Subramanya Sunday, May 19, 2002]

[Editors' Note: BSAP has donated Rs. 3,000/- to 'People for Animals,' Bangalore, towards rehabilitation of Painted Stork chicks, fallen from nests at Veerapuram Heronry.]

Now Pitta in Telugu

It's been our dream for quite some time now to publish a newsletter on birds, in Telugu. This has become a reality with our member, Kalyani Mukesh, volunteering to edit it. The first issue will be released on the 5th June 2002, World Environment Day. The Telugu *Pitta* will be a bi-monthly, 4-page newsletter and will have a totally different set of contents from the English newsletter. It is planned to print 1000 copies and distribute them free to high schools, colleges, government departments, bureaucrats, administrators, educators, village panchayat committees, etc., all over the state. Members are requested to send postal addresses of prospective recipients and help us distribute this newsletter to a wider audience. Kalyani is to be congratulated whole-heartedly for her dedicated work.

Society Matters

At times, the Society arranges impromptu meetings due to the sudden arrival of some personality working on nature conservation. We have been informing members in Hyderabad over the phone about such meetings. In the future, we would prefer to do this over email as well as through the BSAP's website (see bottom of p. 8 for URL). We request members to send us their latest email addresses as well as changed postal addresses at the earliest (we've been getting envelopes marked 'left'). Please send these details to <aasheesh@vsnl.in>.

Many memberships have become due for renewal. We are enclosing renewal forms with this *Pitta* and hope you will continue to remain members of the BSAP. Your membership status is indicated by the date on the last line of your address on the envelope. If you have already renewed your membership, please ignore this reminder.

Get AWB Newsletter Online

"I am pleased to inform you that Newsletter of the Asian Waterbird Census No.3 is on line at www.wetlands.org/IWC/awcmain.html. Please feel free to view and download the newsletter. In addition to updates on the AWC

and related waterbird work, this issue provides interesting and unedited updates from AWC coordinators and from the enthusiastic accounts you can tell that the AWC is still an enjoyable and important programme. We see this newsletter as an important tool to promote the AWC and improve our communication with our AWC network. Please do feel free to let us know if you have any ideas and comments to promote the newsletter and the waterbird monitoring programme. For more information about the AWC, please visit our website or contact myself directly." [David Li, AWC International Coordinator & Waterbird Conservation Officer (Asia), WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL]

BNHS bird room named after Humayun Abdulali

The Bombay Natural History Society dedicated the BNHS Bird Room in memory of Mr. Humayun Abdulali, a doyen of the Indian ornithology in a function held on Monday, 20th May, 2002 at Hornbill House. Dr. Rachel Rueben, former Director, Centre for Research in Medical Entomology was the chief guest. Dr. Rueben, who is writing Mr. Abdulali's biography, spoke on the occasion highlighting Mr. Abdulali's contribution to Indian ornithology. A splendid portrait of Mr. Abdulali painted by Mr. J. P. Irani was also unveiled.

The BNHS Bird Room, which houses 28,000 bird specimens representing bird fauna of the Indian region has been late Mr. Humayun Abdulali's second home when he worked on cataloguing the birds. [Bombay Natural History Society, Press release on Internet mailing lists].

Lost manakin is rediscovered in Brazil

29/05/02 Cambridge, England—The **Golden-crowned Manakin** (*Pipra vilasboasi*) has been found by bird researchers forty-five years after it was last seen and first discovered. However, the finders fear that its survival could be threatened by continued destruction of the rainforest for timber extraction, creation of pasture and road development.

Found again in the **Pará region of Brazil**, the bird is considered to be one of the most enigmatic species of South American bird-life. It was **first discovered** by ornithologist Helmut Sick in 1957, and officially recognised as a species in 1959. Several unsuccessful attempts have since been made to find the bird.

Fábio Olmos who, together with José Fernando Pacheco, re-discovered the species said: "We were thrilled to find the lost manakin—quite distinctive from other manakins." He added: "The local economy of the area is based on logging and cattle-raising on cleared land. The Brazilian government is encouraging colonization but has no way of controlling loggers, squatters, colonists and gold miners once access is created. Forest destruction will remain a major threat to the long term survival of this beautiful bird and other wildlife of the area."

Alison Stattersfield who leads on BirdLife's globally threatened species monitoring said: "This is tremendous news – **this bird hasn't been recorded for 45 years** – but there are genuine concerns that its habitat is under threat from the continued destruction of the fantastic Amazonian rainforest. It is vital that this wonderful natural resource is saved from further destruction and that the Brazilian

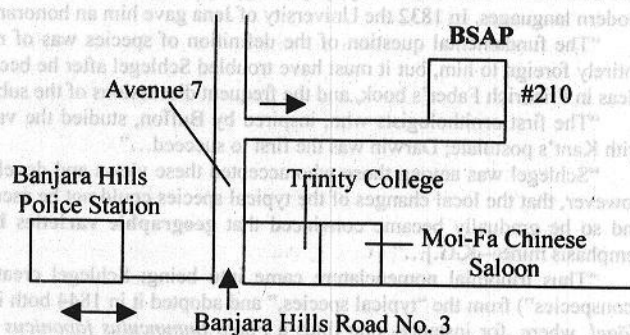
environmental authorities implement an effective system of protected areas for the region's biodiversity."

Notes:

The Golden-crowned Manakin is one of the least known birds in the world—five specimens were found in 1957 and only one since. The species is on the IUCN Red List of threatened animals (status Vulnerable). The manakin was found whilst making surveys along the Cuiabá-Santarém Road which is planned to be paved as part of the Avanço Brasil Development Program to ease transport access for the logging industry. This area is located between the Tapajós and Xingu rivers. There are no protected areas for habitat conservation in this region of Brazil. Existing National Forests and Indian Reserves do not guarantee the integrity of the ecosystem, as timber exploitation along with other potentially destructive activities are allowed. [For further information please contact Ade Long at BirdLife International in Cambridge, UK, on +44 (0) 1223 277 318].

An office for BSAP

Finally we've got an office! The premises (see location map below) will be used as a reading room initially, and will be open only in the evenings. Since we cannot afford to employ staff, members are requested to volunteer 2-3 hours of their evening time for the office. The premises are not yet ready for use, but should be by the middle of June 2002.



The postal address of the premises is as follows.

B.S.A.P.
#210
Avenue 7, Street 3
Banjara Hills
Hyderabad 500034

Members wishing to visit the office are advised to confirm commencement of functioning from Siraj Taher (6612608) to avoid disappointment of finding it locked!

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-52

"In 1857 the careers of three famous ornithologists ended. Soon after Bonaparte died on July 29, the deaths of Johann Friedrich Naumann and Hinrich [sic!—K.G.] Lichtenstein were announced; both men were nearly 80. On January 30, 1858, Temminck died..."

Hermann Schlegel, who now replaced Temminck as director of the Leiden Museum, had been obliged to spend 33 years in a dependent position and to sacrifice [sic!—K.G.] his ability to the service of an often capricious superior, whose intellectual sphere he had long since outgrown. Now that he could at least imagine that he had reached his goal, he was in his fifty-fifth year. He had planned to create an institution to be scientifically valuable according to his own ideas; but would there be enough time left?

Like Bechstein, Naumann, and Brehm, the best-known ornithologists in Germany around 1820, Schlegel came from Thuringia. He grew up in Altenburg, where he was born on January 19, 1804, the first of eleven children of a brassfounder... Like many other boys, Hermann at first became interested in entomology, stimulated by his father's butterfly collection... A chance discovery of a buzzard's nest with eggs led him onto ornithology; he learned taxidermy, made a collection, and kept birds, especially all sorts of birds of prey, in cages. Bechstein's *Naturgeschichte*, a present from his father, became an invaluable guide. In his thirteenth year he was already so experienced with the local birds that he was encouraged to visit Pastor Christian Ludwig Brehm in Renthendorf... "This strange and brilliant man kept me with him during the entire school holidays. Every day he walked with me through the woods and fields, and he was delighted to find how well I knew the flight and calls of the birds. "But one particular experience during this time remained unforgettable for Schlegel; he proved to his instructor that the marsh warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*) described by Bechstein was to be found near Renthendorf, "which Brehm himself refused to credit when I pointed out to him a bird of this species singing in alder bushes near his house, taking it to be an unskillful, as he expressed it, and not yet completely mature icterine warbler (*Hippolais*)..."

When Hermann finished school he had to choose a profession. His father wanted to send him to the university, but with the stipulation that he should choose a safe breadwinning subject, and not perchance the natural sciences. But Hermann did not intend to give up his beloved work with animals, and considering that his father's trade would most readily provide him with leisure for his hobby, he gave up further academic study and learned brassfounding and bookkeeping at home. But soon he felt too cramped by his environment, and before he was 18 he quarreled with his father and set off on his travels. He went on foot to Dresden where he worked for two years for a business friend of his father's and then at Easter 1824 took his savings and walked to Prague and afterward to Vienna. Pastor Brehm had given him recommendations to... Joseph Natterer... [who] secured him a small post in the Imperial Cabinet of Natural History..."

"But Schlegel's scientific inclinations were not the only ones to find plenty of encouragement in Vienna; his old love of music was most happily gratified. Indeed he was able to hear the last performances given by the orchestra that Beethoven himself had trained, and Schlegel thought himself lucky when he and his friends could quietly and from a distance watch the great man take a walk, either in Vienna or in Baden.

...Temminck asked "if perhaps in Vienna a young scientist can be found who not only is familiar with zoology but also possesses practical experience, no matter whether he has attended the university or not. "...[Schlegel] left after only a few days and, travelling by way of Altenburg and Renthendorf, arrived in Leiden on May 25, 1825, where Temminck was able to offer him only a modest and temporary job as preparator because all the other places were filled for the moment..."

"...when the news arrived that Boie, designated by Temminck as his successor, had died, he begged me not to leave the museum. I gave up my plans for traveling because I realized that I could do more important work in such a famous seat of scientific learning." In order to achieve this aim properly, during the next years Schlegel strove chiefly to fill the many gaps in his knowledge. As a registered student at the

University of Leiden in 1830-31 he attended not only the natural history lectures given by Reinwardt (who became his favourite teacher), but also courses on human anatomy, physiology, geology, mathematics, physics, and chemistry, and became more familiar with classical and modern languages. In 1832 the University of Jena gave him an honorary doctorate."

"The fundamental question of the definition of species was of no concern to Temminck, who found any philosophic view of nature entirely foreign to him, but it must have troubled Schlegel after he became acquainted with the writings of his teacher C.L. Brehm, the many ideas in Friedrich Faber's book, and the frequent discussions of the subject from 1823 to 1831 in Oken's *Isis*."

"The first ornithologists who, inspired by Buffon, studied the variability of species were not yet capable of harmonizing their results with Kant's postulate; Darwin was the first to succeed..."

"Schlegel was among those who accepted these views and developed them further. His significant research soon demonstrated to him however, that the local changes of the typical species could not be ascribed to the effect of climate, as Buffon, Pallas, and Faber had thought, and so he gradually became convinced that **geographic varieties had existed since the beginning of creation and were immutable** [emphasis mine—K.G.]..."

"Thus trinomial nomenclature came into being; Schlegel created it in order to distinguish the "local" varieties (which he called "conspicies") from the "typical species," and adopted it in 1844 both in the *Fauna Japonica* and in the *Kritische Übersicht der europäischen Vögel*, where, for instance, one finds a *Falco tinnunculus japonicus* and an *Alcedo ispida bengalensis*. But, in contrast to Brehm, he left individual variations (those not geographically isolated) unnamed for practical reasons, even though it seemed very important to him that they should be known and described in detail, because they belong to "the nature of the species."

"To further "higher points of view" resulting from his frequently expressed conviction that systematics and physical geography were closely related, Schlegel had collected a gigantic quantity of material in Leiden over the years. From some 12,500 stuffed birds, which he had taken over when the directorship changed in 1858, the number had grown to 51,000 toward the end of his life. Most of them were on stands because all his life, like his colleague Cabanis in Berlin and the Parisian ornithologists, he considered only mounted specimens useful. As late as 1878 he energetically opposed the "technique so prized by some English scholars" of having only the most important species mounted and preserving all other birds in the form of skins kept in drawers. "In my opinion this method was invented simply for the greater comfort of scholars, while sacrificing general usefulness..." However, since British ornithologists remained just as firmly attached to their method (which had already been recommended by Swainson) as he did to his, he was forced to watch the London collection grow much faster than that in Leiden after 1872, and, under Sharpe's vigorous directorship, soon outstrip it, though until that time Leiden's had been the largest in Europe."

"Schlegel, who had been tormented by the problem of species even in his youth, was an inveterate opponent of the theory of evolution, and considered Darwin's ideas to be ingenious speculation..."

"Until the end of his life, therefore, Schlegel was to be, in Darwin's words, "incessantly haunted by the shadowy doubt whether this or that form be in essence a species." Because he never succeeded in hitting on a usable (for instance, a geographic) definition of species, he considered that many differences later recognized by systematists as distinguishing species were generally unimportant, and thought they could not justify any promotion to a new name..."

"Thus young scientists, led by Sharpe, Salvador, and Severtzov, could always cite this passage as authority for their zealous persistence in describing even slight geographic variations from the "type" as separate species. But the process more and more quickly brought systematic ornithology into a critical situation. What the experienced Schlegel had sought to avoid, although with impractical methods and an untenable theory, had become reality."

[Erwin Stresemann, 1975, *Ornithology. From Aristotle to the Present*, pp. 192-195, 199-200, 202, 212-213, 215, 217-218.]

The last century has philosophically been a hundred years of "walking up a dead end." Addiction of ornithologists to trinomials and "racial systematics," and abolition of a sensible Code of Nomenclature for an increasingly dehumanistic, mechanical, restrictive, legalistic one, sidetracked the real progress made in the Victorian era of the 19th Century by resident British naturalists here and European ornithologists who worked collections pouring in from the unexplored tropics. From the almost 18,939 mostly good species of Sharpe (1899-1909) we now play with only 9,000 plus and court three times as many which we downgrade as subspecies or races without recognizing their true identity or conservation value!

When I was a post-graduate research fellow at the Delhi University, "learning the ropes" under the able tutelage of Prof. V.K. Gupta, in his Insect Taxonomy Laboratory, of the Department of Zoology, in the early 1970s, he had handed me a paper on "Basic Questions of Systematics" by the Rev. Father Thomas Borgmeier (1957, *Systematic Zoology*, 6: 53-69). This paper matter-of-factly upheld that "There has never been any other species concept than the biological one" (p.60) and quoting Goldschmidt (1940, "The material basis of evolution"): "Subspecies are actually, therefore, neither incipient species nor models for the origin of species, they are more or less diversified blind alleys within the species." Borgmeier concluded his landmark article with practical statements of opinion, "that the introduction of evolutionary concepts into systematics has produced great confusion. The systematist may not be anti-evolutionary, but in practice he is non-evolutionary," and "in opposition to Mayr's assertion (1949, [*Systematics and the Origin of Species, from the viewpoint of zoologist*]—K.G.) (p. 23) that 90 percent of modern taxonomic work consists in [*sic!*—K.G.] the study of variation, I venture to say that 100 percent of systematic research consists in [*sic!*—K.G.] the investigation of the stable elements in Nature. The principle [*sic!*—K.G.] task of the systematist is not "that of detecting evolution at work (Huxley), but is the study of the work of evolution."

This paper, like those of Croizat (1968) on panbiogeography, and of Darlington (1971) on "Modern Taxonomy, reality, and usefulness" (besides his other works) have been my guiding lights in a "sea of confusion" created first by numerical taxonomic juggling, then a cladistic "red Herring" (apologies to Dr C.J. Humphries!), and now with molecular systematics hanging on a slender DNA thread. A hundred years of "wandering in the wilderness," chasing after "racial" variation, and evolutionary baloney, through their God-like "phylogenetic dispensations," bird specialists have set back the taxonomic clock and it is time we got back on the rails again, taking up from where ornithological giants like Sharpe and Hume left off.

Aasheesh Pittie's commendable electronic bibliography of our birds on a CD-Rom held database is, mind you, only a mechanical, computer software-aided documentation. Though positively "reviewed" by Manakadan in the latest *JBNHS* issue [98(3): 430-431], like Rahmani's equally appreciative page (p. 430), and Zafar Futehally's lavish praise [*Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 41(6): 79-80; 2001], about Anwaruddin Choudhury's recent book on "The Birds of Assam" (we are not told whether this is political "Assam" or the geographic, meaning the entire north-eastern portion of India!) these "reviews" are unfortunately mixed with "good words" about the authors rather than a clinical analysis of their work! This trend must be reversed in India—"performances not personalities," like I had emphasized in my Letter

48—or we will end up swallowing, uncritically, everything that is served on our ornithological plates and lose the function of “good taste” and appreciation of “culinary” perfection. Picking the “grain from the chaff” is vital, even when scanning and reviewing (documenting is only the first stage, but essential if accurate and complete) the mass of literature now available. This is why periodical reviews of select subjects, or areas, by accomplished specialists, like Lavkumar Khacher’s Overview of the Birds of Gujarat (1996, *JBNHS* 93: 331-373), are indispensable to keep track of the “grain” and blow away the chaff.

It is a great pity that native ornithologists (there are quite a few experienced and well trained ones now) are standing by and it is foreign bird lovers who are attempting to feed us (and themselves!) with pictorial guides based really on insufficient first-hand experiences of our rich avifauna and their ecosystems, and reliance on published work and bird skins as secondary sources, with many “pitfalls” for the majority of enthusiasts. Teamwork is an unattainable (unfathomable?) ideal for us Indians, and we plug away, each to his/her own, unconcerned with duplication or of databases unknown to us (or ideas and analyses), wastefully writing about the birds of a City, a District or a State, or publishing notes from novices that are unedited and crass. We need to watch how “cricket” is being played, in technique and game plan strategy, and not get “drunk” mainly on the batsmanship class of a Tendulkar or on players of one’s Karnataka State or even of India only. Where are the experts who will analyse our Ornithology and give it direction? This is what I hope to do, with or without help from collaborators worldwide who understand and value teamwork and trust in my “instinct” and scientific grounding and expertise.

I have quoted about Hermann Schlegel (1804-1884) above, in continuation of my attempt to unfold the important pages of forgotten ornithological history before my readers’ eyes. I can do no better now than to end with a passage in Borgmeier’s paper (1957: 63): “The subspecies was first introduced into zoological nomenclature by the ornithologist H. Schlegel (1844) who added a third Latin name to the name of the species (trinary nomenclature). This practice was taken up later by entomologists and is sanctioned today by the International Rules of Nomenclature. With Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) began a movement which can be designated as devaluation of the species. Through the fusion of the doctrine of *Formenkreis* (Kleinschmidt) and *Rassenkreis* (Rensch) with the evolution theory the cult of races came into full swing. Originally destined to cleanse the “Augean stable” (Kleinschmidt) of ornithological nomenclature, it was eagerly seized upon by the neodarwinists (Huxley, Rensch, Mayr). All this led to an inflation of infraspecific nomenclature, which is a symptom of decline and deterioration of present-day systematics. Taxonomy is being reduced to an affair of nomenclature. Systematics becomes the science which gives a great many names to the same thing... Wilson and Brown (1953, p. 102) characterize the situation with the following remark: “from our experience in the literature we are convinced that the subspecies concept is the most critical and disorderly area of modern systematic theory.”

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RESEARCH REVIEW: Fruiting trees and the Great Pied Hornbill

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Kannan, R. and James, D.A. 1999. Fruiting phenology and the conservation of the Great Pied Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) in the Western Ghats of Southern India. *Biotropica* 31(1): 167-177.

Fruit-eating (frugivorous) animals face considerable challenges while trying to find food. Fruit availability is often highly seasonal and is typically unevenly distributed across the habitat. It is no wonder, then, that fruit-eaters tend to be large and mobile (the better to search large areas for food), and often supplement their diet with other food items like insects and lizards. Frugivores also tend to occur at low population densities, and when fruit-bearing trees are destroyed, they become rarer still.

The Great Pied Hornbill is one of the rarest Indian frugivores, and is (via its place on the BNHS logo) a symbol of Indian bird conservation. Despite this, we know relatively little about this charismatic bird. We do know that it is largely fruit-eating and that it lives in humid forests in the more mountainous parts of the subcontinent. In order to investigate the dietary requirements of the hornbill and the phenology (=seasonality) of its food sources, Ragupathy Kannan and Douglas James, of the University of Arkansas, USA studied hornbills and fruiting trees for two years in the Anaimalai hills of the Western Ghats.

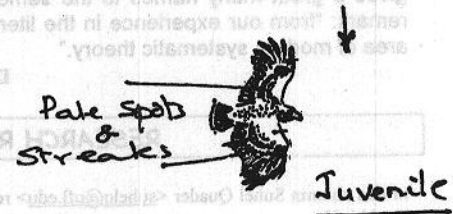
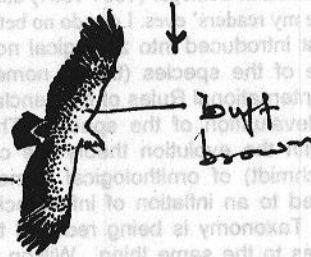
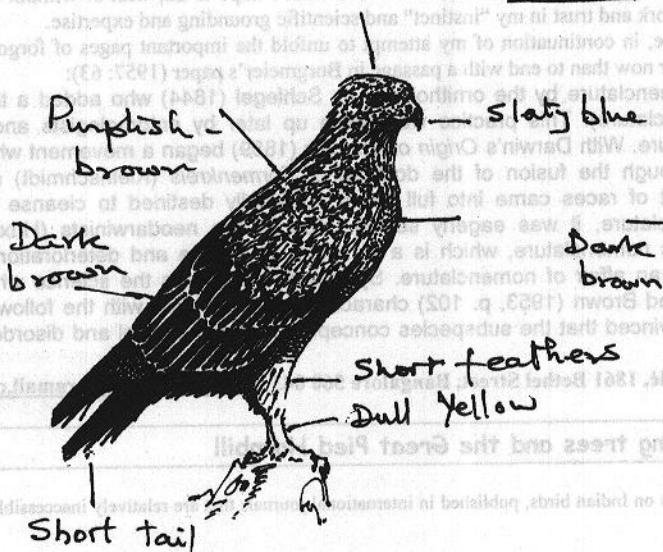
Kannan and James monitored fruiting trees and collected information on bird species seen eating fruits on these trees. In general fruits could be classified as either lipid-rich (e.g., *Polyalthia*, *Cinnamomum*) or sugar-rich (e.g., *Ficus*, *Vitex*). These two classes of fruits showed different seasonal patterns. Lipid-rich fruits were mostly available in the dry season (February-May) and declined thereafter, being completely absent from October to January. In contrast, sugar-rich fruits (largely figs, genus *Ficus*) were available throughout the year with a peak in the dry season and a decline in other months.

Hornbills seem to time their breeding to the peak availability of fruits (i.e., the dry season; for a description of their breeding biology see Kannan and James, 1997. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 94: 451-465). The majority (72.9%) of food items brought to the nest consisted of figs, and, throughout the year, 78.8% of all trips to fruit trees by hornbills were to fig trees. These data indicate that figs are particularly important for hornbills (and other frugivores too), although lipid-rich fruits probably provide important nutrition as well. Kannan and James also suggest that hornbills are the primary dispersers of lipid-rich fruits of *Myristica* and many other locally rare species. If this is true, then the genus *Ficus* may well be a “keystone” in this forest community. A keystone is the stone at the summit of an arch; without this stone, the whole arch collapses. Ecologists use this architectural metaphor to describe species important to a natural community. Without *Ficus*, the hornbills may disappear; without the hornbills, many other tree species may go extinct, and so on. Preserving fig trees, the authors suggest, is of vital importance in the conservation of not only the Great Pied Hornbill, but also the forest as a whole.

FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

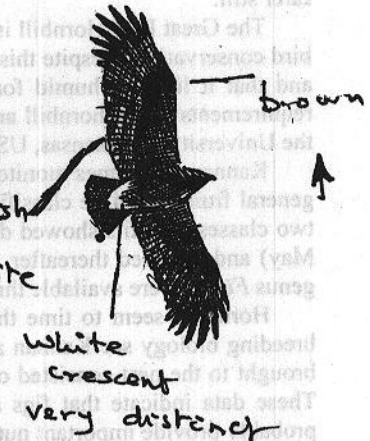
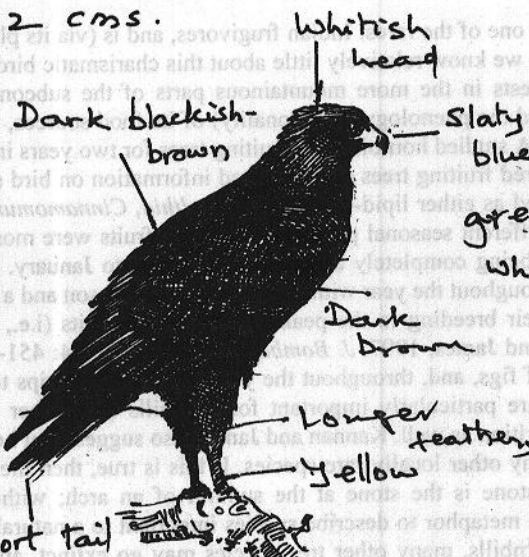
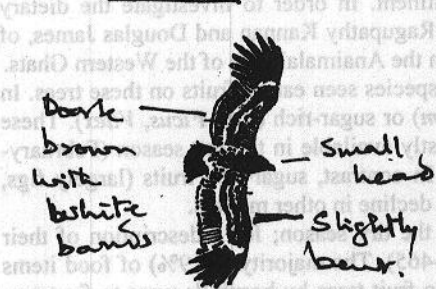
LESSER SPOTTED
(*Aquila pomarina*)
60-65 cms. Kite

ADULT



GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE
(*Aquila clanga*)
65-72 cms. ADULT

Juvenile



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follows Manakadan & Pittie (2001): Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Buceros* 6(1): i-ix, 1-38. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

ANANTHAPUR DISTRICT

Veerapuram

19.v. (SS, SH, VI): PAINTED STORK CB, c. 3,000 N with week-old to fully grown fledglings; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS 25+.
26.iii. (CS): INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 18 on forested hill slope upstream of Srisailem Dam; RED-HEADED VULTURE 2 on forested hill slope upstream Srisailem Dam.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus

12.v. (CTH): PAINTED STORK NT* 200+, LESSER ADJUTANT-STORK VU* 1, EURASIAN SPOONBILL 50+, SPOTTED REDSHANK 50+ br., plm; all feeding on fish in drying irrigation tank bed; BARN OWL 3.
23.v. (CTH, HT): TAWNY EAGLE CB, month-old downy chick on N with F; SMALL BUTTONQUAIL 1 M; RUDDY-BREASTED CRAKE 1; PAINTED SNIPE 10+; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, (half-grown chicks and downy chicks).
3.vi. (CTH): PAINTED SNIPE 15.

DELHI

Okhla Bird Sanctuary

23.iv. (MK): BRONZE-WINGED JACANA 3; CRESTED BUNTING 1 imm. M.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai wetland

25.iv. (BH, BG, SuS, ND): CHESTNUT BITTERN 1 (first of the season); RUFF c. 10,000.

Sultanpur National Park

4.v. (BH, SC): PAINTED STORK NT* 30; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* a pair; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 40; BONELLI'S EAGLE 1 juv.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

9.iv. (SCS, SM, SS): ROSY STARLING 10,000+ on the trees along both sides of the Jhajjar-Rewari road.

REWARI DISTRICT

9.iv. (SCS, SM, SS): ROSY STARLING in large numbers on trees along Jhajjar-Rewari road.

SONIPAT DISTRICT

Diversion Drain Number 8 (Garhi Bala)

20.iv. (SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 12; BAILLON'S CRAKE 1 sub-ad; SPOTTED OWLET inside an old N of House Crow 20' up a tree fork (willow) the bird not seen on consequent dates; SPANISH SPARROW 1 M in br., plm.

29.iv. (SCS): LITTLE GREBE CB, ad., feeding 4 yng; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB, 2 ad., feeding 1 juv; STRIATED BABBLER CB, 1 carrying insect towards N.

Gurgaon Water Supply Channel (Kakroi-Chhota Thana Canal Rest Houses)

28.iv. (SCS, AM): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 2 in a dry field along the channel; BLACK IBIS CB, 1 ad., with 3 juv., on the dirt track; EGYPTIAN VULTURE CB, 3 active N, 1st c. 25' up a Shisham tree (*Dalbergia sissoo*) with an ad., inside, 2nd c. 40' up a Mango (*Mangifera indica*) with an ad., inside, 3rd c. 45' up a Mango tree with a juv., visible. This is the 3rd year that this N is being used; ASIAN PIED STARLING PRB, const., N on branch of same tree and at the same height as that of the 3rd N of the Egyptian Vulture.

[Note: Holes in the c. 50-year old Mango trees are being used for N by Alexandrine & Rose-ringed Parakeets; Common Mynas; 1 Indian Roller and a few Spotted Owlets who create a lot of noise in Kakroi & Chhota Thana rest houses and also along the water channel.]

JLN Feeder Canal (Gohana-Rithal)

21.iv. (SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 3; EURASIAN WRYNECK 1; SPOTTED OWLET 1 in an old N of a House Crow (?), lined with wheat, 20' up in a Babul tree *Acacia nilotica* fork, on the country road (nearest village Nakloi).

27.iv. (SCS): BLACK IBIS PRB, a pair copulating on a N being const., c. 40' up an *Eucalyptus* sp. standing in a field. 1 bird seen arranging sticks on it; SPOTTED OWLET a bird still in the N as reported on 21.iv and a 2nd bird, from a lower branch, flew at me but turned back without pressing; SIND SPARROW 5.

Kheri Damkal village pond (Gohana)

24.iv. (SCS, SM, SS): PAINTED STORK NT* 16 ad.

Mohamedabad marshes

14.iv. (SCS, SM): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 2; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+12+4+11+2+2 (=33) in flt; SIND SPARROW PRB, 1 M carrying N-mat., entering from the usual hole, into a disused Baya Weaver's N c. 15' up a Babul tree.. 2 F also around.

24.iv. (SCS, AJU, RK, Pn): PAINTED STORK NT* 10+1; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 2; SARUS CRANE VU* 19+2 (a few chasing Painted Storks); PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 2 fledglings seen with ad; EASTERN SKYLARK CB, 4 yng., in a grassy N on ground.

29.iv. (SCS): SARUS CRANE VU* 12+2; EASTERN SKYLARK CB, 4 fledglings.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Binmaranahalli

18.v. (SS): COMMON MYNA PRB, carrying N-mat., to its N placed amidst the top whorl of a coconut palm; BLACK DRONGO CB, incubating.

29.v. (SS): COLLARED SCOPS-OWL 2, calling all night.

Girinagar

22.v. (JNP): PARIKH KITE CB N since iii.2002 c. 10m up a Coconut Palm. Ad. feeding yng. Ad., continue adding N-mat. N not abandoned in spite of people trying to smoke out a colony of Rock Bees from under the N.

GKVK Campus

16.v. (SS): GREY PATRIDGE CB, with 6 two-week-old (?) fledglings; COMMON MYNA CB, carrying food to N.

28.v. (SS): LESSER WHISTLING-TEAL 11; INDIAN ROLLER POB, courtship disp; BLACK DRONGO CB, feeding a fledgling; JUNGLE CROW PRB, carrying N-mat.

Jakkur Tank environs

23.v. (SS): LITTLE EGRET 250+ feeding in shallow waters of Jakkur Tank; INDIAN ROLLER CB with food in its beak at N in a *Ficus religiosa* tree; STREAKED FANTAIL-WARBLER CB 1 N with 5 eggs being incubated by a F. 2 N under const., by disp., M; PLAIN PRINIA POB, singing.

Kenegeri

26.v. (UPA): Scrub forest near 'People for Animals' facility: ORIENTAL HONEY BUZZARD 2 soaring; PEA FOWL 1 M with full grown train; RED-RUMPED SWALLOW PRB, collecting wet mud from puddles; JUNGLE WREN-WARBLER POB, territorial M singing

CHIKMAGALUR DISTRICT**Balluru**

18.v. (JNP): ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, M singing.

Chikmagalur

17.v. (JNP): CATTLE EGRET and POND HERON in breeding plumage; ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, M singing; BRAHMINY STARLING CB, ad., carrying food; JUNGLE MYNA CB, ad., carrying food into N inside the open end of a telephone pole c. 2.5m up. It chased away a SHIKRA which came close; HOUSE SPARROW C.

Halluluru

18.v. (JNP): WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA PRB, singing, ad., carrying N-mat.

Hornadu

18.v. (JNP): HOUSE SPARROW abundant.

Sringeri

18.05.2002 (JNP): JUNGLE MYNA PRB, ad., carrying N-mat; HOUSE SPARROW abundant.

DAVANAGERE DISTRICT**Chiluru**

10.v. (JNP): BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER CB, 17 N in cut sand-banks of the Thungabhadra river; 1 ad., observed taking in a dragonfly into a N-hole while another caught and took an Emigrant Butterfly *Catopsilia* sp.; HOUSE SPARROW PRB, M collecting straw while F collecting rootlets and cotton as N-mat.

KOLAR DISTRICT**Chikkaballapur**

19.v. (SS): HOUSE SPARROW CB, carrying food to N.

MYSORE DISTRICT**Chamundi Hill**

26.v. (DM): EGYPTIAN VULTURE 6.

SHIMOGA DISTRICT**Kudli**

12.v. (JNP): OSPREY 1 flying across Thunga river; ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, M singing; JUNGLE MYNA CB, ad., carrying food into N in open end of a telephone pole c. 2.5m up.

RAJASTHAN**BHARATPUR DISTRICT****Jaipur-Dausa road**

11.iv. (SCS, SM, SS): ROSY STARLING C on trees on both sides of the Jaipur-Dausa road and Jaipur-Chomu road.

Keoladeo Ghana National Park

12.iv. (SCS, SM, SS): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 2+1+1+1; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU* 1+1 both juv.; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+2+2+2+1+1; COLLARED SCOPS-OWL 1; INDIAN TREEPIE CB, 1 bird sitting in a N 32' up an *Eucalyptus* sp.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

Pigeon Post**Birding is fun, but is it simple?**

"I had today a glorious half hour watching a white-male Asian Paradise-Flycatcher with well over a foot long streamers!! To maintain its distance from me, the bird kept flitting from tree to tree at the edge of the scrub in front of my office at GKVK. Needless to say, my day was made. It was indeed a wonderful sight to watch those long streamers sail so gracefully behind the body. This one was only my fourth white-male in well over 25 years of birding.

"While watching the bird, in order to stay as close as possible and not to lose the sight of it (as I did not have my field glasses), I had to squat on a dirt patch, crane my neck, hide and peep from behind a tree trunk and run half-bent across a road to get to the cover of a dense bush, keeping my eyes glued to the bird all the time. Nearly a dozen women laborers who worked in the adjacent field found my antics quite amusing and stopped working for a good half hour and thought that I had gone nuts. At the end of the day one of them even made it to my office and promptly asked my lab assistant, if I was all right!"

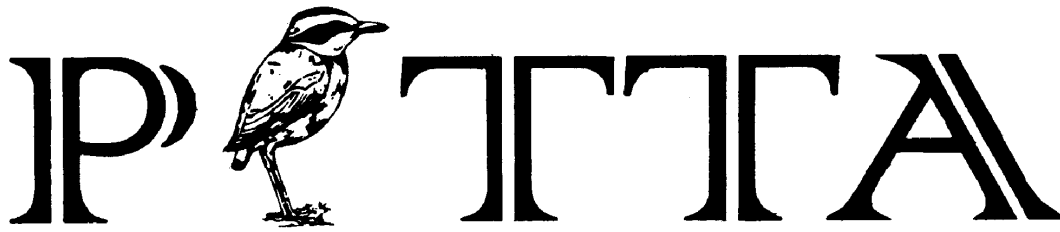
—Dr S. Subramanya, Bangalore.

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP & REMAIN WITH THE BSAP FAMILY!**For Private Circulation Only**

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A. Taher (6612608) Website: <http://www.bsaponline.org> E-mail: aasheesh@vsnl.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 135-136: July-Aug. 2002

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5) (vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 1-ix-2002: Chilkur Mrugavani Deer Park: Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am and assemble near the ticket counter. Carry water and snacks, as this will be a half-day trip. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 16-ix-2002, 6pm: Film show. Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Veerapuram Heronry, Anantapur District

*Veerapuram Declaration for protection of the
Painted Storks*

"We, the residents of Veerapuram—men, women, children—on Sunday, the sixteenth June, 2002 take the following oath in the name of our Village Déity 'Sacred Ramaswamy'.

"We hereby take the oath that we shall wholeheartedly provide protection, food, nesting space and a fear-free environment for the Painted Storks which come every year as our guest for a period of 6 months. We also assure that we will not let any harm befall these birds from the visitors who come to see them. We further promise that we will not in any way use or consume the fish in our lake and the tanks and lakes nearby as they serve as food for the Painted Storks. To this effect, we affix our signatures below.

"We would also like to wholeheartedly thank the Rishi Valley Institute of Bird Studies for arranging this function for the protection of the Painted Storks. This has fired a spark of inspiration in us, which will be pro-actively translated into action. There are no words to express the deep gratitude we feel towards Rishi Valley Institute of Bird Studies and the Management of Rishi Valley School." [This was the oath taken by the residents of Veerapuram village, at a simple yet earnest ceremony, organised by the Rishi Valley Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History. It was attended by the BSAP's Hon. Secretary, Aasheesh Pittie.]

Clever Crow!

A crow has astonished scientists by deliberately bending a straight wire into a hook and using it to extract food from a container. Oxford University researchers watched her successfully repeat the feat nine times in a laboratory, using more than one technique. It is said to be the first time any animal other than a human has shown a clear understanding of cause and effect, and fashioned a tool for a specific task using new materials not encountered in the wild. [*Khalij Times* 10.viii.2002. Clipping sent by Farheen.]

BSAP-IBCN Bustard Project

The BSAP-IBCN project to monitor the Great Indian Bustard at Rollapadu has taken off in June. Dr Bhargavi and Dr Srinivasulu spent 15-17 July in Rollapadu and counted 11 Great Indian Bustard (6 males and 5 females). They report seeing large numbers of Jungle Crows (20+) in Taggubarak area. The next field trip will be during the 2nd Saturday weekend of 13-15 September 2002. Four volunteers will be able to participate in the outing. Please contact Bhargavi or Srinivasulu at 7797223 to book your place early to avoid disappointment.

Our member, Kiran Katikaneni, has been selected to head the Kids For Tigers programme of Sanctuary Asia Magazine, in Hyderabad. This is the 12th city in which the programme is now running.

Farhabad Camp Report

Sushil Kapadia

On 20-21 July 2002, as the sun started smiling at 6am, 22 of us got into four vehicles and took the Srisailem road after the "darshan" of our good old Charminar. The excitement was palpable as each one of us was looking forward to the 2-day camp at the A.P. Tourism Dept.'s new resort at Farhabad.

The group consisted of a varied lot, from the 2½ year old Jahnavi to the elderly Mr Ashok Kumar.

On the way we stopped at Dindi Reservoir and watched a few waterbirds and later stopped at Dindi town for breakfast at an Udipi Hotel.

We reached Mannanur checkpoint and stopped there for tea and another 5 kms from there came the entry point of the Tiger Resort. A huge Tiger's statue, welcomed us at the gates of the tourist resort, where we turned off the road, for a beautiful 8 km drive inside the absolutely green forest to reach our camping site. It was an awesome location with our rooms perched almost on a cliff that dropped 600 feet to the plains.

The main building consisted of a kitchen on the ground floor and a dormitory on the 1st floor for 8 persons. The 2nd floor was a covered terrace. Next to this building was a platform built on a tree.

There were two cottages and a few tents and Chenchu huts also. Newly built, they were clean and neat. In fact we were their first official visitors.

We reached around 10am and after unloading, freshening up and allowing the kids to have a run of the place, we decided to have an early lunch before proceeding to Mallela Teertham, a picturesque waterfall with an isolated temple beside it. But! On reaching the place we found that a *jatra* being celebrated and hundreds of people had come from the surrounding villages. We decided against the steep climb down and returned to base camp.

After lazing around for some time and a gulping down the pollution free breeze, and piping hot tea, which energized us, we took a trek into the forest for birding. There was a surprising dearth of birdlife, while there was ample evidence of heavy grazing by cattle—as there was no undergrowth and no new shoots sprouting from the ground.

Priti Shah, Ritu Naidu and Kalpana Kapadia cooked dinner, while others helped with chores.

A 40-foot cantilevered wooden 'viewpoint' (platform), which juts out over the plains, was the most favoured spot on the campsite. Everyone wanted to sit on it where they enjoyed sizzling *paneer tikkas*. The cold breeze and twinkling lights from the plains below added to the atmosphere. After a hearty meal everybody was shooed off to bed by Shafaat Ulla uncle, our tour organizer. But I could not sit quietly without enjoying a drive in the jungle. Jungles I think are at their best during night. So I went around and pulled everybody out and off we went.

It is an experience in itself—a night drive through a forest. It seems so different from daytime. A herd of Cheetal was seen near a water hole. When we returned at midnight, after two hours, the staff warned us to go indoors, as Sloth Bears enter the campus at night.

5.30am: Tea was ready, courtesy Aasheesh. We left in our cars to another spot, and trekked into the forest for birding, after separating into two groups. A lot of birds and droppings of bears and Cheetal were seen. We returned to the cars for breakfast after which some more birding—and a female Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*! This is an extension of its range.

Everybody enjoyed the trip! The Camp staff is courteous and helpful. We all got together for group photographs and a

big thank you to Shafaat Ulla for making this trip happen. He immediately announced another camp in October and that's one date everyone's looking forward too!

- “A new species of gnatcatcher, currently known only from a small area of whitesand forest in the Allpahuayo-Mishana Reserve, Peru, is in danger of becoming extinct even before being formally described because of an invasion of land speculators to its sand forest reserve.”
- “A brooding Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis* recaptured on Midway Atoll in February 2002 had originally been ringed as an adult in 1956, meaning it is at least 51 years old and establishing a new longevity record for North American birds in the wild.”
- “A new breeding locality for Black-necked Cranes *Grus nigricollis* (Vulnerable) was found in northern Gansu Province, China, in July 2000 when 12 birds, including two newly hatched chicks, were seen at Yanchiwan Nature Reserve.”

[Extracts from BirdLife International's *World Birdwatch* vol. 24 no. 2, June 2002]

Church protects parrots and palms

“Just days before Palm Sunday, the Catholic Church in western Colombia elected to support alternatives to cutting down wax palms for adorning traditional processions. Instead, Fundación ProAves – Columbia distributed more than 2,500 balloons, 2,000 tree branches (from coffee, eucalyptus and pines), and 500 palm fronds (from abundant lowland species) to churchgoers. Wax Palms *Ceryxylon quindiuense*—an endangered species—are cut down to adorn processions and churches throughout the Colombian Andes each Palm Sunday. The critically endangered Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* is entirely dependent on the wax palm for nesting and roosting.” [World Birdwatch 24(2): 6.]

Editorial Comment: Why can something similar not be done about the Ganesh Immersion ceremony in Hussain Sagar in Hyderabad? All citizens of Hyderabad are (or should be) concerned about the toxic pollution that this event produces. If the government and the concerned organizers take on the moral responsibility of working towards a pollution-free Hussain Sagar, it can be done.

BSAP Camp in October 2002

The Society is arranging a 2-day camp, 26-27 October 2002, at Vyaparla, which is approx., 160km from Hyderabad, situated on the banks of the Krishna River. One travels on NH7 towards Bangalore, turning left at Pebbair, and arriving at Vyaparla after 18km. Accommodation will be in dry stonewalled houses. A ruined fort stands across the river. The grasslands around Vyaparla abound in Blackbuck and other fauna of this vast vanishing habitat. A visit will also be made to Kholapur, at the foot of the Nallamalai range of the Eastern Ghats, 25km away, for birding in a different habitat. Contributions will be Rs.600/- per head, payable in advance. Please contact Shafaat Ulla (3353098) at the earliest to book your place, as accommodation for only 20 people is available.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-53

“As a result of Sclater’s and Sharpe’s influence, the three zoologists of the Tring Museum, Rothschild, Hartert, and Dr. Karl Jordan (from 1893), were regarded in England as peculiar outsiders. But here too the “hereditary conservatism” about which Seebohm had already complained gradually yielded to a new point of view. In 1905 a much-traveled private collector of birds, Harry Forbes Witherby (1873-1943), decided to advocate Hartert’s method in the *Ibis*. Two years later he founded the periodical *British Birds*, in which he favoured the new school. Finally, in 1912, still under the glare of the elderly Sclater, the “destructive” nomenclature crept into the *Ibis* itself, and when in the same year the completely trinomial *Hand-list of British Birds* was published (by Witherby, F.C.R. Jourdain, and N. F. Ticehurst, together with Hartert), only a few people grumbled at the unfamiliar names. The stoutest bulwark of binomialism had fallen after a 20-year siege.

Trinomials might perhaps have encountered less enduring and fierce opposition in England if their use had not involved serious consequences: the rejection of the Strickland Code of Nomenclature, to which English ornithologists had adhered since 1842. They were rightly proud of it, because its well-thought-out stipulations had proved their value remarkably well. Strickland, one of the brightest luminaries in ornithology, had compiled it, and in 1842 the British Association, at its Manchester meeting, had accepted it as binding. At that time the lack of consistent rules had reduced the nomenclature of species and genera to chaos. Babel had broken out not because there was no critical compendium of species described, but principally because many authors willfully brushed aside the historic privilege of the first man to describe a species.

Linnaeus, the creator of binomial nomenclature, had himself laid the groundwork for this arbitrary procedure when in 1751 he set forth, in his *Philosophia botanica*, the aesthetic, philological, and other rules to be observed in the allotment of names. In ornithology, his guidelines for the limitation of the law of priority were first followed by Illiger, who in 1811 believed he had to replace all generic and specific names that were not classically formed with purer ones...

“...In 1835 Strickland energetically attacked the arbitrary alteration of established terms, and advocated that the rule of priority be strictly followed; he found immediate agreement and emulation among influential ornithologists like Bonaparte (1838), George Robert Gray (1840), Keyserling and Blasius (1840), and others. Finally he worked out the firm and carefully thought-out rules that have been known since 1842 as the Strickland Code. In it he called the “Law of Priority the only effectual and just one,” and he founded it on the twelfth edition of Linnaeus’s *Systema naturae* (1766). Exceptions were allowed only for names that clearly contained false information (like *Picus cafer* for a Mexican woodpecker, or *Muscicapa atra* for an olive-green bird). He also prescribed a change in the species name whenever it was used as a generic name (not *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax* Linn., 1766, but *Pyrhcorax alpinus* Vieillot, 1816). He recommended that the specific name should take precedence over everything else, and that the author’s name be put in parentheses whenever the specific name was joined to a new generic name instead of to the original one, *Muscicapa crinita* Linn., for example, becoming *Tyrannus crinitus* (Linn.).

By accepting these rules English ornithologists soon achieved the desired conformity in nomenclature. In other countries, too, such as Italy and France (chiefly thanks to Bonaparte’s influence), the Strickland Code was used as a guideline, and when the German ornithologists Hartlaub and J. R. Blasius accepted it as well, the community of scholars really seemed, in Strickland’s words, to have put itself under new laws...

“That parenthesis-monster, as illogical as it is unhistorical, imported from abroad and often too well liked,” also aroused Cabanis’s passionate opposition...”

“At first Finsch (*Die Papageien*, 1868) sided with those late German ornithologists who still kept Illiger’s laws instead of following the Strickland Code. But a review of his book by the witty A.O. Hume in 1874 seems to have cured him of the heresy for the rest of his life: “Let us treat our author as he treats other people’s species. ‘Finsch!’ contrary to all rules of orthography! What is that ‘s’ doing there? ‘Finch!’ Dr. *Fringilla*, MIHI! Classich gebildetes Wort [a classically formed word]!””

“But just when it seemed finally that the Strickland Code, whose text had been freshly approved by the British Association in Newcastle in 1863, would unite all ornithologists, the barely achieved stability and conformity of the nomenclature was upset by a violent blow from America.

The ornithologists there had come to the conclusion that the Strickland Code needed reform because it had proved too liberal and still allowed too much room for individual whims. The reins must be tightened and all those rules permitting any deviation from absolute obedience to the law of priority should be dropped, however annoying the immediate results of such vigorous new measures might be. Even when the orthography of a name was philologically wrong, it must be kept, unless it contained an obvious typographic error. As a logical consequence of following the rules, the law of priority should be antedated to begin not with the twelfth (1766) but with the tenth (1758) edition of the *Systema naturae*. The new rules, carefully worked out in 1883 by J.A. Allen and Elliott Coues, were accepted in 1885 by the American Ornithologists’ Union and thereby became binding in the United States.

In Europe the rejection of the Strickland Code at first was violently opposed, and when the ornithologists on the Continent had begun to agree to it, Alfred Newton, one of the founders of the British Ornithologists’ Union in 1858, wrote to the president of the Second International Ornithological Congress in Budapest, on May 4, 1891:

As an ornithologist [I] especially lament the adoption of the American Ornithologists’ Union of a Code, differing so entirely from that, which in principle, had hitherto been maintained. No greater blow at the much desired uniformity of nomenclature was ever delivered, and its immediate effect has been, to render a good deal of the excellent work of recent American ornithologists almost unintelligible to their European bretheren.

But his words fell on deaf ears. In Germany the American rules had been applauded by Berlepsch and Hartert, who influenced their adoption by the sixteenth annual meeting of the Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft, held at Frankfurt am Main on May 12, 1891. A few days later the Budapest Congress also approved them, so that in future “the absolute principle of priority with all its consequences [should form] the basis for the rules of zoological nomenclature,” and the law of priority should begin with the tenth edition of the *Systema naturae*.

Although this new arrangement forced many changes even among the commonest names, it was almost unanimously followed in Germany. The one exception was Hartert's friend, Alexander Koenig, an explorer with a large private collection in Bonn, who declared, at the twenty-first annual meeting of the Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft at Dresden in 1897, that he did not need to put on a straitjacket; every scientist was free to follow his own line. He made a temperamental attack on the "illogical" reduplicated names; to avoid using them he would choose the next oldest specific name (as the Strickland Code had prescribed). Hartert, on the other hand, not merely defended before the meeting the use of the same name for genus and species, but took the next logical step and recommended that the "typical" subspecies (which until then had not been particularly identified, or had been marked by the word *typica*) should be identified in the nomenclature by the repetition of the specific name. One should not be frightened off even by such constructions as *Ciconia ciconia ciconia* (L.). The members present were either amused or appalled. But in 1898 Tschusi in Europe and H.C. Oberholser in America were already following his recommendation, and soon afterward this last bitter result of the American principle, "a name is only a name, having no meaning until invested with one by being used as the handle of a fact," had established itself among all the trinomialists.

The elderly English ornithologists, who had been educated in the humanistic tradition, followed with mounting distaste the increasing mechanization and barbarization of nomenclature that the liberal rules of the Strickland Code had been intended to combat, and it is understandable that they defended themselves to the end against the threatening wave. But it was no use. After they had tried in vain to influence the decisions of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, P.L. Sclater and Howard Saunders resigned from this body in 1901." [Erwin Stresemann, 1975, *Ornithology. From Aristotle to the Present*, pp. 263-267.]

Uniformity in nomenclature is the most sought after 'nirvana' by biologists. This "Letter" will try to make amateur bird watchers understand what the rejection of the Strickland Code and the really forceful lobbying (through the influence of powerful individuals) for the adoption of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature now in operation has done to animal names and their use. The quotation from Stresemann above will give synoptic details of the changes in the last century, like the subspecies concept which was also ushered in just by the strength of numbers and created the mess that ornithological trinomials now present to us. I was always querulous about this three-word name for an animal or a plant and wondered how there could be a "half-breed" or "low caste" population that was "on the way to becoming a species!" Like the science of biogeography fascinated me and held me in rapt curiosity about the aeons of evolution and geographic distribution, not only of the living things on this planet, but also the movement of the continents on earth whose centre was taught us to be incredibly hot and molten ("Twenty thousand leagues under the sea" of Jules Verne vintage!), volcanoes acting as "safety valves" and earthquakes resulting when geological plates jostled with each other for position.

The great Master Linnaeus introduced to us biologists an absolutely ingenious nomenclatural standard, the binomen, which gave each distinct species (with a unique life-cycle and isolating mechanisms which prevented inter-specific fertility, through it crossing with another distinct species, except for hybrids which were sterile after a second generation, at most), a name (first letter in lower case) and this placed in a Genus name (which had the first letter in capitals and came initially, before the species name) which also indicated the higher/broader familial (phylogenetic) relationship of the species and its "cousins." In those days phylogenetic methods were rudimentary and relationship was sought to be shown on "trees." Now, at least in Entomology, phylogenetic relationships are worked out in detail, using all kinds of concepts and methodologies (and computer software programmes) and the binomen does very well in indicating all kinds of hierarchical evolutionary relationships and levels. Entomologists have not embraced the subspecies concept (except for workers who play with butterfly names), like ornithologists have "fallen for it," and nomenclature and systematics of insects and their allies is in much better shape, in my opinion. I am labouring to show the utter unreality of what are held to be "subspecies" which are tenable only when they occupy a distinct geographical/ecological distribution/territory and these are what were earlier (before Seeböhm, Hartert and the Americans) considered good species. These are even now fairly easily diagnosable from other "subspecies" of the same polytypic species, which latter is really a superspecies as I have discovered, coming into Ornithology, again, from Entomology with an absolutely open mind and trained in the systematics of the little tiny animals which can really give you problems in recognizing species limits, so that taxonomists have to also look at their genitals to really be sure!

The strict application of the Rule of Priority to give the original discoverer and christener of a taxon name his/her credit, is fine by me, but I relent at the current hugely mechanistic Code which is becoming more dehumanistic and giving short shrift also to the rules of gender and style and beauty in coining new scientific names. Even repetition of the "typical" name (like *Ciconia ciconia* above mentioned) in a binomen is also okay by me but overruling gender to use species names now as they were first spelt is, to me, really the limit! J.W. Brown (2001, *J. Lepidopterol. Soc.*, 55: 1-7) rightfully joked about the latest edition of the I.C.Z.N. Code, in his Presidential Address, in despair, and many things human are getting ridiculous. The animals we try to discover, name, understand and study are not interested in our concepts or lobbies. We need to "return to reality" so we do not hold a reproductively isolated, usually geographically distinct, species as a "lower caste" of another really distinct life-cycle in nature and confuse the whole issue we are trying to comprehend. Richard Bowdler Sharpe, the wise J.L. Sclater, and their contemporaries in the Victorian 19th Century were right, I now see; so no new "revolutionary" DNA-DNA techniques or any other "modern" methodologies are going to change true species from what they are in the field and have been so for millions of years, or at least several hundred thousands.

[Errata: Letter # 51—Page 3, Last Line should read "lighter or"; Page 5, Para 2, Line 5 should read "Jochen", Line 6 "sonagrams"; Para 3, Line 4 should read "Verhandeligen."]

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RESEARCH REVIEW: A scandal exposed: the dishonesty of a famous ornithologist

In this column Suhel Quader <suhehq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Rasmussen, P.C. and Collar, N.J. 1999. Major specimen fraud in the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux (Athene auct.) blewitti*. *Ibis* 141:11-21.

The enterprise of science depends on the honesty of its practitioners. To be sure, there is a degree of regulation—results that cannot be confirmed independently must be viewed with caution; potential conflicts of interest must be disclosed by researchers so that any bias is not kept hidden. But scientists are, after all, human. The twin temptations of fame and fortune corrupt a number of us, so why expect scientists to be immune? Still, if you are anything but a hardboiled cynic, you probably would not impute wilful fraud to most pronouncements of scientists or, more to the point, ornithologists.

A re-examination of some accomplishments of Richard Meinertzhagen (1878-1967) provides evidence that this prominent ornithologist was not above using fraudulent means to further his interests. Meinertzhagen was a Colonel in the British army, and a dramatic, if controversial, figure in the twilight of the British empire. (Sālim Ali's impressions of him can be found in Ali's autobiography "The Fall of a Sparrow".)

The specific allegation against Meinertzhagen is that he stole bird specimens collected by others and relabeled them as his own, often after transforming their original appearance. A particularly well-researched case is that of his Forest Owlet specimen, collected (his label reads) at Mandvi in Gujarat on 9 October 1914, and now at the Natural History Museum, UK (formerly BMNH). Also in existence are four specimens collected by James Davidson in Khandesh, Maharashtra between 1880 and 1883, one specimen from Orissa (1872, F.R. Blewitt), and another from eastern Madhya Pradesh (1877, V. Ball). Davidson's bequest to the BMNH lists a fifth Khandesh specimen (1884), but this is missing from the collection.

To test the hypothesis that the Meinertzhagen specimen is actually Davidson's missing 1884 bird, Pamela Rasmussen (Smithsonian Institution, USA) and Nigel Collar (BirdLife International, UK) conducted a detailed examination of this specimen and Davidson's four skins. They also examined other representative specimens collected and prepared by these two ornithologists to study their techniques (a difficult task in Meinertzhagen's case because many of his specimens are suspected to be fraudulent). There are several lines of evidence indicating that Meinertzhagen misappropriated his owlet (some only revealed through X-ray photographs). Characteristic features of other specimens collected by Meinertzhagen are absent in his Forest Owlet. On the contrary, Davidson's style of specimen preparation is very distinct (perhaps because he was self-taught), and can still be discerned in Meinertzhagen's owlet because modifications were made long after the skin had dried. Among the changes made: the elongated neck (Davidson's style) was compressed; the upper bones of the wing were removed (Davidson retained them); the ventral incision was lengthened and the old stitches replaced; and the legs were twisted and altered from the original position. Forensic analysis of cotton used in the preparation of Meinertzhagen's owlet indicates that the fibres match those of cotton used by Davidson in his specimens.

Apart from the specimens themselves, Rasmussen and Collar found other evidence that Meinertzhagen's label is wrong. His diaries and collection register give no indication of an expedition to Mandvi in October 1914 (or, indeed, at any other time). If there actually was such an expedition, it is curious that Meinertzhagen collected but a single bird. It was also a new record for the century, but he never wrote of it in his diary, or ever published on it.

Among the consequences of this fraud: the range of the Forest Owlet was misrepresented, leading to precious resources being wasted in the search for this species. Meinertzhagen's fabrication probably delayed its rediscovery by many years, until it was finally spotted again in 1997, 113 years after the last authentic record, in the area where Davidson collected his specimens.

Meinertzhagen's bird collection—about 20,000 specimens—was donated to the BMNH in 1954. It is one of the largest single donations to the museum, and Meinertzhagen described it as "uniquely perfect". However, even in his own day there were suspicions of dishonesty. Charles Vaurie wrote in a letter that he was certain the collection contained skins stolen from other museums. But it is only in the past decade that clear evidence of wrongdoing has been found. Work by Alan Knox (1993 *Ibis* 135:320-325) indicates that many redpoll (*Carduelis* spp.) specimens, as well as single skins of a few other species, are fraudulent. There is also evidence that a specimen of *Phylloscopus tytleri*, claimed by Meinertzhagen to be his, and collected at Chakrata (western Uttaranchal) in 1912, was actually collected by W. Davison at Simla in 1880 (Rasmussen 1998 *Forktail* 14:17-28). The British Ornithological Union has taken the unusual step of stating that "numerous Meinertzhagen specimens have been labelled wrongly and that the data associated with them must often be incorrect" (BOU 1997 *Ibis* 139:431).

What did Meinertzhagen hope to gain by stealing specimens and fudging data? The answer is still unclear. He appears to have stolen particularly high-quality skins, perhaps to improve the quality of his collection, and he may have altered labels to provide evidence for his ideas. More will undoubtedly be published on the good Colonel's scientific escapades and this is as it should be. Dishonesty and fraud are anathema to science; cases like this must be investigated and exposed, in part to correct the record but also to discourage others who may be tempted to stray from the narrow path of scientific honesty.

REVIEW—Aasheesh Pittie

Baskaran, S. Theodore (2002): *The Dance of the Sarus: Essays of a Wandering Naturalist*. Reprint ed. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Paperback (13.5cm x 21cm), pp. i-xvii, 1-240, 8 photographs [black & white, by; M.Y. Ghorpade (cover), John Isaac, Theodore Baskaran]. (ISBN 019566256-3). Price: Rs. 175.

Natural history is such a subject that it can be pursued wherever one is stationed. And if work takes one all over the country, then its pursuit becomes a joy. Theodore Baskaran retired from the Indian Postal Service as a Post Master General. His career took him to various interesting places in India and his interest in nature always made these postings a boon. He has travelled “from the alpine landscape of Arunachal Pradesh to the scrub jungles of Madurai, from the deserts of Kachch to the wetlands of Manipur.”

This book of 53 essays is a treat to read. The essays have been compiled from the author's articles in various newspapers and magazines like *The Hindu* (41), *Frontline* (4), etc. His varied subjects cover birds (23 essays), mammals (10), habitats (10), conservation issues (10) and domestic animals (3). The bird essays cover species from the monogamous Sarus Crane, the endangered Great Indian Bustard, the Haflong phenomenon in Assam, to a sketch of the “Pope of Indian Ornithology.” No, not Sálím Ali, but the indefatigable A.O. Hume.

“Written in a style that combines the fleeting glimpse with the transcendental vision, the poetic spirit with scientific inquiry, Baskaran's sparkling prose captures the sights and sounds of the Indian wilderness.” At Rs.175/- this is one book well worth reading and being the proud owner of. I give below an extract from his essay on Hume (pp. 63-65).

“Hume spent all his holidays and leisure time in exploration. Over a period of twenty-five years, he had collected 63,000 bird pelts and 19,000 eggs, spending 20,000 pounds from his own pocket. He housed these in his own building in Simla, Rothney Castle. This was the world's largest collection of eggs of Asiatic birds...Hume retired voluntarily in 1882 to devote more time to matters closer to his heart. Lord Lytton offered him the post of Governor of Punjab but Hume declined politely saying that he could not bear to sit through all the entertainment to be done...When he was away from Simla in the winter of 1884, his house was burgled and much of the collection was destroyed...Heart-broken, Hume gave away what was left of the collection to the British museum of Natural History...Grateful for the gift, the museum sent one of its curators to Simla to collect the material.”

While on this subject of Hume, I would like to quote from a paper by Edward C. Moulton [1992. The contributions of Allan O. Hume to the scientific advancement of Indian ornithology. *The Indian Archives* XLI(1): 1-19]. This is Sharpe's (none other than the formidable Bowdler Sharpe), who came to collect Hume's phenomenal collection, own account of Hume's ornithological museum.

“I gladly accompanied Mr. Hume at once into the museum...I had heard so much from my friends, who knew the collection intimately, ...that I was not so much surprised when at last I stood in the celebrated museum and gazed at the dozens upon dozens of tin cases which filled the room. Before the landslip occurred, which carried away one end of the museum, it must have been an admirably arranged building, quite three times as large as our meeting-room at the Zoological Society, and...much more lofty. Throughout this large room went three rows of table cases with glass tops, in which were arranged a series of the birds of India sufficient for the identification of each species, while underneath these table-cases were enormous cabinets made of tin, with trays inside, containing species of the birds in the table-cases above. All the specimens (*sic!*) were done up in brown-paper cases, each labelled outside with full particulars of the specimen within...At each end of the room were racks reaching up to the ceiling, and containing immense cases full of birds...On the western side of the museum was the library, reached by a descent of three steps—a cheerful room, furnished with large tables, and containing besides the egg-cabinets, a well-chosen set of working volumes. One ceases to wonder at the amount of work its owner got through when the excellent plan of his museum is considered. In a few minutes an immense series of specimens could be spread out on the tables, while all the books were at hand for immediate reference...we went below into the basement, which consisted of eight great rooms, six of them full, from floor to ceiling, of cases of birds, while at the back of the house two large verandahs were piled high with cases full of large birds, such as Pelicans, Cranes, Vultures, & c. An inspection of a great cabinet containing a further series of about 5000 eggs completed our survey: Mr. Hume gave me the keys of the museum, and I was free to commence my task at once.”

Moulton continues, “The task of checking, sorting and packing the specimens took nearly a full month, with Sharpe and his assistants working every day from ‘six in the morning till sunset’. Hume's pre-engaged carpenters had already built 26 large wooden crates, but 21 more were required. When packed with the tin boxes of specimens, Sharpe estimated the average crate weighed about half a ton...As finally despatched, the collection for deposit at the British Museum consisted of ‘63,000 birds, 500 nests, 18,500 eggs, besides 400 skins of Mammalia.’...Within four months of Sharpe's departure from Shimla the whole of Hume's ornithological collection...arrived safely at the British Museum.” Sharpe's tribute read “Mr. Hume was a naturalist of no ordinary calibre, and this great collection will remain a monument of the genius and energy of its founder long after he who formed it has passed away...Such a private collection as Mr. Hume's is not likely to be formed, again; for it is doubtful if such a combination of genius for organization with energy for the completion of so great a scheme, and the scientific knowledge requisite for its proper development, will again be combined in a single individual.”

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2001): Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Buceros* 6(1): i-ix, 1-38. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Farahabad

21.vi (A Pittie, S Ulla, T Hash, others): PEAFOWL 1 N with 4 eggs, F incubating; GREATER GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER 1 F.

DELHI

Bawana Escape Channel (Kadipur)

12.vi (SC Sharma): WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN CB, 2 juv., with 2 ad., separately; GREATER COUCAL CB, 1 yng with 1 ad.

Budhpur village

12.vi (SC Sharma): CATTLE EGRET CB, 42 N on 4 *Prosopis juliflora*.

Okhla Bird Sanctuary and nearby areas

19.v (B Harvey, others): BLACK BITTERN 1 (uncommon); PALE MARTIN 2 in flt.

26.v (B Harvey, others): DARTER NT* 1; YELLOW BITTERN 2, first of the season; CHESTNUT BITTERN 5; BLACK BITTERN 2; PAINTED STORK NT* 1; GREATER FLAMINGO 35+; SMALL BEE-EATER CB, ad., carrying food into N-burrows; WHITE-TAILED STONECHAT 1 M; BANK MYNA CB several yng demanding food.

2.vi (B Harvey, others): DARTER NT* 2; PURPLE HERON PRB, several carrying N-mat; YELLOW BITTERN 30 PRB, in disp., flt; CHESTNUT BITTERN 15; BLACK BITTERN 6; PAINTED STORK NT* 4; RUFOUS-BACKED SHRIKE CB, ad., feeding yng.

4.vi (B Harvey, M Szabo, R Thomas): RIVER LAPWING CB, 10 N pairs; RIVER TERN 60+.

Wazirabad Waterworks (Yamuna)

12.vi (SC Sharma): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 26; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 32.

HARYANA

GURGAON DISTRICT

Basai wetland

15.vi (B Harvey): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 F; GLOSSY IBIS 54; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 110; SPOT-BILLED DUCK 50; NORTHERN PINTAIL 1 M; GARGANEY 1 M; SARUS CRANE VU* CB, 1 on N; WATERCOCK 5 M, 3 F; LESSER SAND PLOVER 2 M; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, yng., seen; COMMON REDSHANK 1; MARSH SANDPIPER 22 (in worn br., plm.); COMMON GREENSHANK 1; BLACK-WINGED STILT CB, yng., seen.

JHAJJAR DISTRICT

Bhindawas Lake Bird Sanctuary

4.vi (B Harvey, M Szabo, R Thomas): DARTER NT* 6; WHITE-NECKED STORK 10; BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1 M; BLACK IBIS 40; COMB DUCK 50+; SARUS CRANE VU* 1 pair; SIND SPARROW PRB, 1 N nearly complete, 10 pairs.

ROHTAK DISTRICT

HUDA Water Works

23.v (SC Sharma): SPOT-BILLED DUCK 163, GARGANEY 1 M; BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER 53.

Seepage Marsh along JLN Feeder canal

23.v (SC Sharma): PURPLE HERON PRB, 1 flying with N-mat., into reeds, 10; SHORT-TOED SNAKE-EAGLE 1; TAWNY EAGLE 1; GREY FRANCOLIN CB, pair with 7 yng; SARUS CRANE VU* 4+2+2+2=10; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, pair with 3 yng; YELLOW-LEGGED GREEN-PIGEON CB, 1 N on same branch as Black Drongo (see next); BLACK DRONGO CB, 1 N 20' up babul tree.

7.vi (SC Sharma): SPOT-BILLED DUCK CB, 1 ad., with 8 ducklings.

Tilyar Lake

23.v (SC Sharma): INDIAN SHAG CB, 10 N; DARTER NT* 30 POB, in br., plm.; LITTLE EGRET CB, 30 N; MEDIAN EGRET CB, 5 N; CATTLE EGRET CB, 230 N; LITTLE GREEN HERON 2 (uncommon); BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON CB, 15 N.

7.vi (SC Sharma): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* CB, 30 N.

SONIPAT DISTRICT

Canal Rest House (Gohana- Rithal)

23.v (SC Sharma): INDIAN ROLLER POB, 1 entering a N-hole, 10' up very old Sisam *Dalbergia sissoo*; LESSER GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER PRB 1 F inside a 2" N-hole, 8' up Neem *Azadirachta indica*, while 1 M probing bark.

Delhi Branch of Western Yamuna Canal

5.v (SC Sharma): BLACK-NECKED STORK NT* 1M, 1F; BLACK IBIS CB, 1 ad., incubating (see *Pitta* #134 p. 7); GREY FRANCOLIN CB, 1 ad., with 6 yng; SARUS CRANE VU* 2.

7.v (SC Sharma): WHITE-NECKED STORK PRB, a pair in the old N (see *Pitta* #127 p. 7) 40' up a Seesam *Dalbergia sissoo* with 1 bird inside and 1 on nearby branch; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING CB, 4 eggs with pointed ends inside a hollow scrape on ground with 1 incubating bird and 1 standing guard (uncommon) (nearest village Hulleri); SIND SPARROW CB, an active N 12' up a babul tree, just 2' higher than last year's disused N (nearest village Juan).

26.v (SC Sharma): WHITE-NECKED STORK CB, 1 bird sitting inside probably incubating; SIND SPARROW CB, pair very demonstrative against intrusion though eggs were not there. Another pair demonstrating 500 meters away in the similar habitat.

7.vi (SC Sharma): WHITE-NECKED STORK adult bird still sitting/incubating (see above).

Diversion Drain Number 8 (Rithal - Gohana)

23.v.2002 (SC Sharma): BANK MYNA PRB, carrying N-mat., inside 50+ N-holes on a high bank.

Home Garden

20-23.v (SC Sharma): PURPLE SUNBIRD CB, 1 F feeding 2 juv., on a *Quisqualis indica* creeper.

15.vi (SC Sharma): RED-VENTED BULBUL CB, ad., feeding 4 yng., in a N 8' up a *Quisqualis indica* creeper.

Kakroi Canal Rest House

5.v (SC Sharma): COLLARED SCOPS-OWL CB, ad., with juv., in a N-hole 20' up a dead mango tree (6.15 PM), first sighting for Sonipat district.

7.v (SC Sharma): COLLARED SCOPS-OWL ad., and juvenile still there (9.30 AM).

Mohamedabad marshes

7.v (SC Sharma): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* c. 50 roosting on eucalyptus trees; LESSER WHISTLING-DUCK 26; SARUS CRANE VU* 2+2; BLACK DRONGO 1 ad., (maybe incubating) on N 25' up babul tree with an active N of EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE and ASIAN PIED STARLING on the nearby branches.

19.v (SC Sharma): YELLOW-FOOTED GREEN PIGEON CB, incubating 1m away on the same branch as above.

RAJASTHAN

19.v (SC Sharma): DARTER NT* 2; CHESTNUT BITTERN 1 calling 'ok ok ok' on a reed and 2 chasing each other flying over the reeds, first of the season; SARUS CRANE VU* 8+6+2+2+3=21 including a pair displaying; GREATER PAINTED-SNIPE 1 pair on the water edge, first of the season; BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER 1 in br., plm., first of the season; STRIATED BABBLER PRB, 1 carrying N mat in a thicket under the babul with BLACK DRONGO's N; GRACEFUL PRINIA PRB, carrying N mat.

26.v (SC Sharma): ORIENTAL HONEY-BUZZARD 1 soaring with a chick (possibly of Red-wattled Lapwing) as 10+ Red-wattled Lapwings chivying; SARUS CRANE 3+2; SPOTTED OWLET CB, 1 perched on the margin of a fresh N c. 20' up on a fork of an unidentified tree and another sitting nearby (this N was probably completed in one week as it was not there earlier).

10.vi (SC Sharma, S Mudgal): CHESTNUT BITTERN CB 1 juv; WATERCOCK 3 M + 1 F, M disp., (M calling 'uk uk uk uk utumb utumb utumb', 1 M chasing another with partially raised wings, both running in circles till one flies away, much smaller F nearby).

YAMUNANAGAR DISTRICT

Tajewala Waterworks, Yamuna (near Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary)

6.vi (SC Sharma, others): PAINTED STORK 28; GREY-BELLIED CUCKOO hrd.

ALWAR DISTRICT

Sariska Tiger Reserve

10.v (N Ghosh): LONG-BILLED VULTURE 60 on a water whole + 30 on and around a sambur stag carcass.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

OBITUARY: K.S.R. Krishnam Raju

S.A. Hussain

With great shock I just learnt the sad demise of Mr. K.S.R Krishnaraju, Honorary Secretary of Andhra Pradesh Natural History Society (APNHS), Vishakhapatnam, on 23 July 2002.

Raju, as he was affectionately called, joined BNHS Bird Migration study station in Point Calimere (PTC), Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu as a Field biologist and took over from me when I returned from PTC to BNHS Bird Room in 1970's.

Raju was a gentle soul, ever smiling and helpful and had vast knowledge of bird lore from Andhra Pradesh. Eastern Ghats birds were his speciality. He had organised special field expeditions to Eastern Ghats jointly participated by BNHS and the Smithsonian Institution under Dr. S.D. Ripley's leadership. I remember very well our trips to Lamasinghi, Khammam, Bhadrachalam, in scorching summer heat to look for the Jerdon's Courser way back in 70's.

Raju was a bundle of enthusiasm, never losing his cool under severest of stress. He had a keen eye for birds in the field and kept copious notes of whatever he observed.

He has several papers on Indian Natural history to his credit and was a regular contributor to BNHS Journal. Incidentally Raju was of the first generation field biologists of BNHS along with Robert Grubh, V.S.Vijayan, and myself who came up to reckoning with the BNHS Bird Migration Project. May our friend Raju's soul rest in peace.

A few important publications of KSRK

Raju, K.S.R.Krishna (1984): Avifaunal resources of northern Andhra ghats and some ecological considerations. *In: Proceedings of the Seminar on Resources Development and Environment in the Eastern Ghats*. March 24-27, 1982. Pp. 131-133.

Raju, K.S.R.Krishna (1985): *Checklist of Birds of Visakhapatnam Region*. 1st ed. Andhra Pradesh Natural History Society, Visakhapatnam. Pbk. (14.5cm x 21.5cm), 3 pr.ll. ("Checklist of Birdsof Visakhapatnam region"), pp. 1-25.

[“This list contains all records of bird species identified (300 speceis (sic) so far in Visakhapatnam region (the revenue districts of Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram) including data on some aspects of their ecology and conservation.”]

Ripley, S.Dillon; Beehler, Bruce M. & Raju, K.S.R.Krishna (1988): Birds of the Visakhapatnam Ghats, Andhra Pradesh. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 84(3): 540-559. (1987).

Raju, K.S.R.Krishna; Krishnamurthy, A.V.R.G.; Reddi, C.Subba; Reddy, N.A.V.Prasad; Lokaranjan, R. & Shankar, K.J.N.G. (1988): Status of wildlife and habitat conservation in Andhra Pradesh. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 84(3): 605-619. (1987).

Ripley, S.Dillon; Beehler, Bruce M. & Raju, K.S.R.Krishna (1988): Birds of the Visakhapatnam Ghats, Andhra Pradesh-2. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 85(1): 90-107.

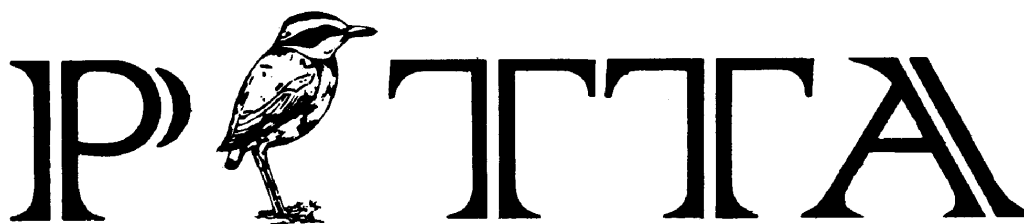
[Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie]

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A. Taher (6612608) **Website:** <http://www.bsaponline.org> **E-mail:** aasheesh@vsnl.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100; Student=25 per annum. Life=1,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 137: September 2002

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5) (vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 29-ix-2002: University of Hyderabad, Gachibowli: Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45a.m. and assemble near the main gate. Carry water and snacks, as this will be a half-day trip. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher at 6612608 before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 16-ix-2002, 6pm: Film show. Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

EDITORIAL

This is a slim issue of *Pitta*, as we would like to make up for lost time. Too, members are informed about monthly programmes through this bulletin and bringing it out on time is essential. Regular features will be restored from the October 2002 issue.

NOTICE (Dated 7.ix.2002)

Annual General Meeting for the Year 2001-2002

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh will be held on Monday, 14th October 2002 at 6.00pm at Vidyananya High School, 'Green Gates', Opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad. Members are requested to attend the meeting. Please treat this as the official Notice of the AGM.

AGENDA

1. Presentation of Annual Report by Honorary Secretary.
2. Presentation of accounts for 2001-2002 by Honorary Treasurer.
3. Appointment of auditors for the period 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003 and fixing their remuneration.
4. Any other business.

Note: Only those persons who have paid their membership for the year 2001-2002 are eligible to attend the AGM. Members can pay their membership dues before the commencement of the AGM and attend the meeting.

—Honorary Secretary

BSAP Camp at Vyaparla in October 2002

There has been enthusiastic response for this camp and all seats are now booked. Participants are requested to pay the money to Shafaat Ulla (3353098), who will also answer queries about the trip, before 25th September 2002. Please note that 50% charges will be levied on cancellations.

BSAP Library & Reading room

The library and reading room of the Society is now functional. It shall be open from 6pm-8pm from Monday-Saturday (both inclusive) except on holidays. There is a small collection of books, journals and periodicals in our 'library' that members can peruse. At present, lending facilities are not available. We receive copies of the following journals and periodicals on an exchange basis: *World Birdwatch* (from BirdLife International), *Samsad News* (Prakriti Samsad) and, *Birds* (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds). Besides these, there are copies of *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, *Hornbill*, *Zoo's Print*, *Zoo's Print Journal*, etc.

Donate to the BSAP library!

Now that we have a library and reading room that is accessible to members, we request readers to donate books, journals, reports, thesis, periodicals, etc., on natural history, to the library. Your donations will contribute in making the resource base of the Society stronger. All such donations will be acknowledged in print and on the donated material. Of special value will be old *Journals* of the Bombay Natural History Society.

Mass contamination of birds of prey in Mongolia

It looks that the mass mortality of the cranes, as well as other birds, most notably rodent-eating birds is true, and has an (unprecedented) huge scale. With ornithological team led by Prof. Sumya and Magister Gombobaatar from the Mongolian State University we had discovered the mass poisoning of various birds and mammals in April early May in central Aimaqs of Mongolia. Golden Eagles, Saker Falcons, Upland Buzzards, Daurian Jackdaws, Herring Gulls, Corsak and

Red Foxes, Manul Cats, voles and granivorous passerines were found dead. We have dissected several individuals—the

picture is all the same—vast haemorrhage in the cranium and coronary veins, blood clots in the mouth in mammals and eagles. It looks that the poison paralysed the animals' breathing centres of the brain thus leaving them to suffocate.

Demoiselle Cranes were found dead as soon as they started to arrive during spring migration. I guess Mr. Batdelger found one of the poisoned hotspots, however our estimation is that the poison reached only small proportion of migrating cranes. The breeding density in our study areas seemed to be stable. However we might have missed something—more at the end of the season.

The local herders from this year onwards receive a huge [amount] of poisoned grains from the local authorities and distribute them by hand (!) in vole high-density areas. No proper marking or proper instructions are given. The poison comes from somon (regional settlement) authorities and they receive them from provincial (aimag) authorities in rations—10 tons (!) per somon. Huge budget money was spent to import the poison from China (where similar cases have been reported). From somons local herders receive the poisoned grain and bring them to their fur tents (gers) where they keep the poison without proper marks with their own food.

Several human deaths have already been reported (Uundeer Songin Newspaper and radio broadcast), several kids were [sent] to

hospital. The hospital reported some kind of poison based on brom, however it looks that there is no up-to-date toxicological lab in Mongolia. Its actions do not even remotely resemble the zinc-based poison, which was previously sprayed from aeroplanes to control voles.

The chemical used in the poisoned grain looks to be a persistent poison, which is transferred between organisms along the trophic chain. All birds and mammals could be [its] victims, humans included. The scale of the poisoning is [extraordinarily large] and covers at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of Mongolia and coincides with the [range] of [a] large numbers of Brand's Vole (*Microtus brandti*).

The cases we have reported (in writing, with photos) to the Ministry of Nature and Environment on 17 May 2002, [have not resulted in any action]. The application of poison is usually recommended in early spring, as it is considered that you cannot influence the vole increase in summer.

The potential damage of the current poisoning could exceed the DDT story, unless prompt action [is] taken now.

[From the field: Eugene Potapov, Asian Project Leader, The Falcon Research Institute, Penllynin, College Rd, Carmarthen SA33 5EH, UK. Circulated on nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU on 7.vi.2002 by Jevgeni Shergalin.]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—54

"As the new Darwinian orthodoxy swept through Europe, its most brilliant opponent, the aging embryologist Karl Ernst von Baer, remarked with bitter irony that every triumphant theory passes through three stages: first it is dismissed as untrue; then it is rejected as contrary to religion; finally, it is accepted as dogma and each scientist claims that he had long appreciated its truth.

I first met the theory of continental drift when it labored under the inquisition of stage two..."

"Today, just ten years later, my own students would dismiss with even more derision anyone who denied the evident truth of continental drift—a prophetic madman is at least amusing; a superannated fuddy-duddy is merely pitiful. Why has such a profound change occurred in the short space of a decade?

Most scientists maintain—or at least argue for public consumption—that their profession marches towards truth by accumulating more and more data, under the guidance of an infallible procedure called the "scientific method." If this were true, my question would have an easy answer. The facts, as known ten years ago, spoke against continental drift; since then, we have learned more and revised our opinions accordingly. I will argue, however, that this scenario is both inapplicable in general and utterly inaccurate in this case.

During the period of nearly universal rejection, direct evidence for continental drift—that is, data gathered from rocks exposed on our continents—was every bit as good as it is today...During the last ten years, we have collected a new set of data, this time from the ocean basins. With these data, a heavy dose of creative imagination, and a better understanding of the earth's interior, we have fashioned a new theory of planetary dynamics. Under this theory of plate tectonics, continental drift is an inescapable consequence. The old data from continental rocks, once soundly rejected, have been exhumed and exalted as conclusive proof of drift. In short, we now accept continental drift because it is the expectation of a new orthodoxy.

I regard this tale as typical of scientific progress. New facts, collected in old ways under the guidance of old theories, rarely lead to any substantial revision of thought. Facts do not "speak for themselves"; they are read in the light of theory. Creative thought, in science as much as in the arts, is the motor of changing opinion. Science is a quintessentially human activity, not a mechanized, robotlike accumulation of objective information, leading by laws of logic to inescapable interpretation..."

"Many readers may be disturbed by my argument for the primacy of theory. Does it not lead to dogmatism and disrespect for fact? It can, of course, but it need not. The lesson of history holds that theories are overthrown by rival theories, not that orthodoxies are unshakable. In the meantime, I am not distressed by the crusading zeal of plate tectonics, for two reasons. My intuition, culturally bound to be sure, tells me that it is basically true. My guts tell me that it's damned exciting—more than enough to show that conventional science can be twice as interesting as anything invented by all the von Dänikens and in all the Bermuda triangles of this and previous ages of human gullibility."

[Stephen Jay Gould, 1977, "The Validation of Continental Drift," In: *Ever since Darwin. Reflections in Natural History*, pp. 160-162, 167. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, U.K.]

"Taxonomy is the study of classification. We apply rigorous rules of taxonomy to other forms of life, but when we get to the species we should know best, we have particular problems.

We commonly divide our own species into races. Under the rules of taxonomy, all formal subdivisions of species are called subspecies. Human races, therefore, are subspecies of *Homo sapiens*.

During the past decade, the practice of dividing species into subspecies has been gradually abandoned in many quarters, as the introduction of quantitative techniques suggests different methods for the study of geographic variability within species. The designation of human races cannot and should not be divorced from social and ethical questions pertaining to our species alone. Nonetheless, these new taxonomic procedures add a general and purely biological argument to an old debate."

"...Geographic variability, not race, is self-evident. No one can deny that *Homo sapiens* is a strongly differentiated species...But the fact of variability does not require the designation of races..."

"The category of species has a special status in the taxonomic hierarchy. Under tenets of the "biological species concept," each species represents a "real" unit in nature. Its definition reflects this status: "a population of actually or potentially interbreeding organisms sharing a common gene pool." Above the species level, we encounter a certain arbitrariness. One man's genus may be another man's family..."

"The subspecies differs from all other taxonomic categories in two fundamental ways: (1) Its boundaries can never be fixed and definite because, by definition, a member of one subspecies can interbreed with members of any other subspecies in its species (**a group that cannot breed with other closely related forms must be designated as a full species**) [emphasis mine—K.G.]; (2) The category need not be used. All organisms must belong to a species, each species must belong to a genus, each genus to a family, and so on. **But there is no requirement that a species be divided into subspecies. The subspecies is a category of convenience** [emphasis mine—K.G.]. We use it only when we judge that our understanding of variability will be increased by establishing discrete, geographically bounded packages within a species. Many biologists are now arguing that it is not only inconvenient, but also downright misleading, to impose a formal nomenclature on the dynamic patterns of variability that we observe in nature."

"...Why, then, did they continue to treat geographic variation by establishing subspecies? They did so because objective techniques had not been developed for mapping the continuous variation of a species...Maps constructed for other single traits almost invariably present different distributions: size may be large in cold climates and small in warm, while color may be light in open country and dark in forests.

A satisfactory procedure for objective mapping demands that variation in many characters be treated simultaneously. This simultaneous treatment is called "multivariate analysis." Statisticians developed the basic theories of multivariate analysis many years ago, but its routine use could not even be contemplated before the invention of large electronic computers..."

"During the past decade, studies of geographic variation have been transformed by the use of multivariate analysis. Almost all the proponents of multivariate analysis have declined to name subspecies. You cannot map a continuous distribution if all specimens must first be allocated to discrete subdivisions. **Is it not better simply to characterize each local sample by its own morphology and to search for interesting regularities in the maps so produced?** [emphasis mine—K.G.]

The English Sparrow [*Passer domesticus*; our "House Sparrows" are *Passer indicus* and *P. parkini*—K.G.], for example, was introduced into North America in the 1850s. Since then it has spread geographically and differentiated morphologically to a remarkable degree. Previously, this variation was treated by naming subspecies. R.F. Johnston and R.K. Selander (in *Science*, 1964, p. 550) refused to follow this procedure. "We are not convinced," they argued, "that nomenclatural stasis is desirable for a patently dynamic system." Instead, they mapped multivariate patterns of variation..." [S.J. Gould, 1977, "Why We Should Not Name Human Races—A Biological View." *ibidem*, pp. 231-236.]

Very recently, on May 20th 2002, the scientific world community lost one of two leading contemporary biologists (in my opinion), located on each side of the Atlantic Ocean, who could also write in a pleasing, comprehensible manner, for the amateur and layman. The gentlemen I am referring to are Dr Richard Dawkins (Oxford University) of England and Dr Stephen Jay Gould (Harvard University) of the United States of America.

An "Obit" of the latter, written by Joel Achenbach of the Los Angeles Times, was reproduced in the Deccan Herald's "Science & Technology" special section, on May 28th 2002 and, I quote:

"A brilliant scientist who can write beautifully is an unusual creature, almost an evolutionary impossibility. It's like a flying horse, or a talking shark. Nature usually is sparing when it hands out talent and specializations. Stephen Jay Gould—who died of lung cancer last week at the age of 60—was a prize example of a very rare breed.

Gould was a professor at Harvard, a longtime columnist for *Natural History* magazine, the author of numerous best sellers, and a dependably feisty public intellectual. He didn't suffer fools gladly; he pummeled them in print. Like his hero Lou Gehrig, he was a durable figure, filling a monthly column for 27 years before signing off finally at the millenium. Even when stricken with a usually fatal form of cancer 20 years ago, and devastated by chemotherapy, he insisted on meeting his deadline. "When I'm writing, it's the only time I don't feel pain," he told his editor."

"He was a really wonderful explainer of science to the nonscientific public. Most scientists who do that simplify everything almost to the point of telling lies. Steve never did that," his Harvard colleague Richard Lewontin said Monday."

"...In his final column for *Natural History*, he said the continuity of life on Earth for 3.5 billion years, through planetary cataclysms and ice ages, is "most worthy of pure awe—a metaphorical miracle, if you will."

He was something of a miracle himself."

The Hindu newspaper also carried a reprinted Tribute to Dr S.J. Gould (on Sunday 2nd June 2002) by Carol Kaesuk Yoon of the New York Times, which ended:

"Whether eloquently and forcefully championing new or forgotten ideas or dismantling what he saw as misconceptions, Dr. Gould, who died in bed in his library among his beloved books, spent a career trying to shed light on an impossibly wide variety of subjects. He once wrote, "I love the wry motto of the Paleontological [*sic!*—K.G.] Society (meant both literally and figuratively, for hammers are the main tool of our trade): *Frango ut patefaciam*—I break in order to reveal."

Carol Yoon also wrote:

"Most people knew Dr. Gould as an entertaining essayist. Credited with saving the dying form of the scientific essay, he often told tales of scientific insight by pulling together unrelated ideas or things. (He began one essay by conjoining Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin—an unlikely couple—noting his discovery that they were born on the same day.) A champion of the underdog (except in his support of the Yankees), he favoured theories and scientists that had been forgotten or whose reputations were in disrepair. Dr. Gould also popularised evolutionary ideas at Harvard, sometimes finding his lecture halls filled to standing room only."

Stephen Jay Gould, she also penned:

"...achieved a fame unprecedented among modern evolutionary biologists. The closest thing to a household name in the field, he became part of mainstream iconography when he was depicted in cartoon form on "The Simpsons". Famed for both brilliance and arrogance, Dr. Gould was the object of admiration and jealousy, both revered and reviled by colleagues."

His most famous, ground-breaking and controversial evolutionary theory was "Punctuated Equilibrium," or what was termed "evolution by jerks" (!) by his critics.

My own present theory of several so-called subspecies/races of birds actually being good, reproductively isolated, closed life-cycle, geographically separated, distinct populations of individual identity, needing to be recognized, again, as real species, will perhaps "overthrow" the current "orthodoxy," which I believe is an outdated and untenable theory propounding the existence of a racial, "low caste," taxonomic category. Variation, clinal or "geographic," needs better understanding and analysis (multivariate) to determine whether currently held polytypic species are either actual species-complexes/superspecies (with non-interbreeding "races") or are variable species only

exhibiting clinal variation across latitudes and/or altitudes (in body or body-part sizes or in intensity of plumage colour). The latter is obvious and exemplified in us humans (*Homo sapiens*) who still are able to interbreed across our recognized "races," but exhibit geographical variation that is "ticketed and docketed and filed," as Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid, Australoid, Capoid...but with much intergradation and social contact. The former has been begun to be pointed out by me, both in these "Letters" in *Pitta*, and in my OPEN LETTER to be published in *Humea*, *Field Ornithology* and, hopefully also, soon in both the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* and in *Buceros*, as an abbreviated edition?

Writing of Stephen Jay Gould, one cannot but resist mention of John Gould (1804-1881), the artist extraordinaire, son of a gardener in Dorsetshire, England, whose Indian bird paintings (with local plants & insects also shown!) are one of the best I have ever seen anywhere. His first volume "A Century of Birds from the Himalayan mountains" was published, in large elephant folio format, in 1832. For the next 50 years John Gould painted and published 41 volumes, comprising of some 2999 plates, a remarkable achievement, helped by his wife who was also a good artist, besides an expert lithographer as well. The Bombay Natural History Society has 6 of the 7 volumes of Gould's "Birds of Asia" (1850-1883, completed by Richard Bowdler Sharpe) and its present Honorary Secretary, J.C. Daniel, once wrote:

"He had an eye for the mood and essence of a bird and in his hands, the birds came vibrantly alive in the illustrations."

John Gould has two Indian bird species named after him and his wife: *Turdus gouldii* Verreaux, 1871, or Gould's Thrush found in the Assam area (related to the Grey-headed Thrush of the Himalayas), and *Aethopyga gouldiae* Vigors, 1831, or Mrs Gould's Thrush of the Himalayas. He has also himself named, described and/or painted new species of our birds, like Gould's Rubythroat, *Cyanosylvia pectoralis* Gould, 1837 (from the Western Himalaya, related to the "Himalayan Rubythroat") and the Blue-winged Laughing Thrush, *Garrulax squamatus* Gould, 1835 (found in the Eastern Himalaya and the Assam area), besides others, like our White-bellied Tree Pie, *Dendrocitta leucogastra* Gould, and the Ruby-throated Bulbul, *Pycnonotus gularis* Gould!

Like Dr Stephen Jay Gould, I see much value in the writings and analyses of our older naturalists and ornithologists who worked in India and in Europe and, I believe "in my guts," that Allan Octavian Hume and Richard Bowdler Sharpe were perhaps more correct when they recognized 1,608 Indian sub-continent species and 18,939 World species, than current bird watchers and ornithologists are, with their significantly reduced numbers dealt with for the "bird fancier" in their recently illustrated bird books.

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & <flycatcher@eudoramail.com>

RESEARCH REVIEW: Openbill nesting and human disturbance

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Datta, T. and Pal, B.C. 1993. The effect of human interference on the nesting of the openbill stork *Anastomus oscitans* at the Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary, India. *Biological Conservation*. 64:149-154.

For those charged with managing our nature reserves it is not an easy matter to strike the delicate balance between minimizing the extent of human disturbance and allowing some form of public access to the treasures they protect. Such access is necessary for various reasons, including tourism (a source of much-needed funds), nature education, research, and the extraction of renewable resources by locals whose livelihoods depend on this. What kinds of impacts do these kinds of human activities have on the wildlife we want to conserve? Tanmay Datta and B.C. Pal, from North Bengal University near Darjeeling were interested in this question with specific reference to colonially-nesting waterbirds.

Datta and Pal studied the nesting of Openbill Storks in Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary, West Bengal, between 1987 and 1990. Over this four-year period, an average of 9,463 pairs bred each year in the sanctuary. Every year, the authors carried out observations on nesting storks—they watched for signs of disturbance from a watchtower and examined nests at regular intervals to evaluate nesting success. They divided human disturbance into two categories. "Indirect" disturbance was due simply to the presence of tourists and forest department personnel. For example, occasional loud sounds caused breeding birds to fly away, and when this happened crows often attacked eggs and nestlings. "Direct" disturbance included instances when humans stole eggs and nestlings, collected the breeding plumes of egrets, and cut firewood from the very trees the birds were nesting in. While indirect disturbances were much more frequent, direct disturbances had a far more serious effect. Firewood collection, for example, forced parents to leave their broods for long periods of time, and often caused chicks to fall out of the nest. Different parts of the sanctuary experienced different degrees of direct disturbance and there was a strong relationship between the frequency of such disturbance and the mortality of chicks.

What is the reaction of the storks to all these disturbances caused by humans? In the area with the highest direct disturbance the number of breeding pairs of storks remained relatively constant over the four years of the study, even as all other nesting areas in the sanctuary experienced a rise in the number of breeding pairs. This indicates that the storks are somehow evaluating the degree of disturbance when deciding where to nest. Since most direct disturbance occurs towards the end of the breeding season it is possible that storks whose nesting attempts have been disrupted seek other nesting sites in the next breeding season.

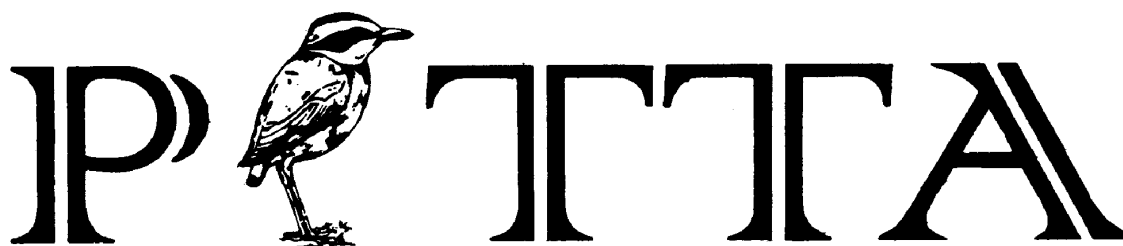
Clearly, human impacts on wildlife can be severe, even within protected areas. To reduce these effects, one must first measure and describe them. Basic monitoring of population sizes and reproduction is necessary to gauge the health of our wildlife. Datta and Pal's study indicates that every sanctuary, not only those containing glamorous animals like tigers and blackbuck, can benefit from careful and continuous monitoring programmes.

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Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 3-xi-2002: Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45a.m. and assemble near the temple culvert. Carry water and snacks, as this will be a half-day trip. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher (6612608) or Shafaat Ulla (3353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 14-x-2002, 6pm: Annual General Meeting. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Increase in Membership Rates of B.S.A.P.

In its meeting of 12th September 2002, the Executive Committee of the Society revised the membership rates of the Society with immediate effect. The new rates are as follows,

Admission Fee: Rs. 100/- (for all categories.).

Annual Membership: Rs. 200/- p.a.

Life Membership: Rs. 2,000/-.

Student Membership: Rs. 100/- (up to graduation.).

Existing Annual/Ordinary Members have the option of converting to Life Membership at Rs. 1,000/- before 31st March 2003. You are urged to utilise this facility and become a Life Member of the Society!

Zoo's Print Journal, *Cheetal*, etc.) and books (40+). The library is open from 6pm-8pm, Monday-Saturday. Volunteers in charge are: Mon.—Kiran Katikaneni, Tue.—Siraj Taher, Wed.—Nritunjuna (Ritu) Naidu, Thu.—S. Ashok Kumar, Fri.—M. Shafaat Ulla and Sat.—Humayun Taher.

The postal address of the premises is as follows.

B.S.A.P., 1st Floor, "Raju Nivas", #210, Street 3, Avenue 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034.

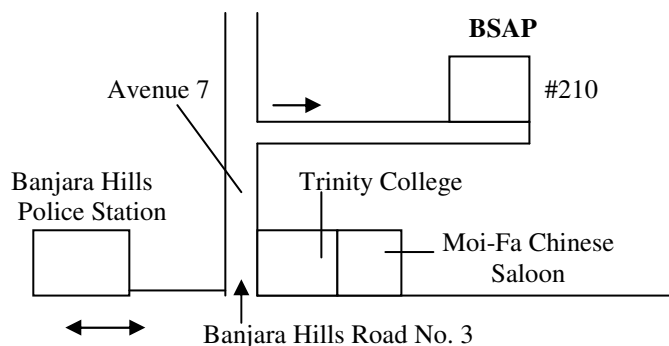
Telugu Pitta

The 2nd issue of the *Telugu Pitta* is now ready. We would like to thank the Bombay Natural History Society's "Indian Bird Conservation Network" (IBCN) for financial support in its publication. A thousand free copies will be posted to schools, junior colleges, environmental education centers of the A.P. Forest Department and, district science centers.

Eco-run for Uppalapadu

Parimi Patanjali, an erstwhile member of the BSAP (and a marathoner), is now part of a U.S. based NGO, System for Purposeful Environment by Conservation of Indigenous and Endangered Species (SPECIES; www.speciesonline.org), that has a two-fold mission, "To conserve the rapidly dwindling wildlife habitat by using Internet technology and global resources. To effectively integrate sustainable development with bio-diversity conservation in such a way that people live in harmony with nature." He has taken up the cause of the Uppalapadu Heronry near Guntur in A.P. (see earlier issues of *Pitta*) as an ongoing project of SPECIES. In this connection, he was in Hyderabad to raise funds for, and spread awareness about, the heronry and also to convince the government to protect the site. To publicise the issue, SPECIES organised an Eco-run in which Patanjali (and

Society Reading Room



Members are urged to avail the facility of the reading room. We have a small library with many interesting magazines (*Birds*, *Birdwatcher's Digest*, etc.), journals (*Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, *Hornbill*, *Zoo's Print*,

others) ran about 18km. N. Chandrababu Naidu, chief minister of A.P. flagged-off the run which ended with a reception at Public Gardens, by the forest minister, Ch. Ayyannapatrudu. They have promised a sum of Rs. 55 lakhs for the development of the Uppalapadu heronry and speedy implementation!

India's Black Market in Birds Threatening Rare Species

India is home to some 1,200 different species of birds. Despite measures designed to protect this rich array of bird life by banning the capture and trade of wild birds, records indicate that as many as 300 of these species are caught and traded with impunity.

The estimate comes from figures compiled by the Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce (TRAFFIC). These records show that large seizures of illegally captured wild birds in India number about 30 each year. In one of the largest recent incidents illustrating the huge scale of this flourishing black market, more than 10,000 birds were confiscated at the Mumbai (formerly called Bombay) international airport in March 2001.

Until 1991, India was one of the largest exporters of wild birds to international bird markets. Most of the birds traded were parakeets and munias, especially the rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), the black-headed munia (*Lonchura malacca*) and the red munia (*Estrilda amandava*). Most of these birds were exported to countries in Europe and the Middle East...

In 1991, however, an amendment to the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 was adopted that bans all trade and trapping of indigenous birds in the country.

However, "the ban is ineffective, as illegal bird trade flourishes in almost all cities, towns, and rural hamlets of the country," said conservation biologist Abrar Ahmed, who worked until recently with TRAFFIC-India and is now with the premier body for ornithological research in India, the Bombay Natural History Society, based in Mumbai.

"The trade is not limited to domestic markets," he added. "There is continuous large-scale bird smuggling out of the country."

Ahmed said a project funded by the Indian government discovered that a number of the wild birds on the Indian subcontinent that are being widely traded are threatened species, including the swamp francolin (*Francolinus gularis*), green munia (*Estrilda formosa*), Finn's baya (*Ploceus megarhynchus*), and Shaheen falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

The findings indicated that of the many different species being traded, 16 are among the world's most highly endangered, 36 are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and six are included on the Red Data list of endangered species compiled by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Ahmed is now updating a decade-long study on the state of bird trading across India that he conducted as part of his doctoral thesis. The initial study, "Live Bird Trade in Northern India," was published by TRAFFIC-India in 1977, and Ahmed expects to release the enlarged follow-up report by the end of this year.

Illegal But Widespread Practice: The study entailed following bird trails and documenting the numbers of birds

being captured or traded. During his surveys, Ahmed directly witnessed more than 200,000 birds that had been caught in the wild by traders and kept in captivity.

Samar Singh, former secretary-general of the World Wide fund for Nature-India, called Ahmed's study on trade in India's wild birds "pioneering in its approach and analysis, since several hitherto unknown aspects of the trade in birds have been brought out."

Asad R. Rahmani, director of the Bombay Natural History Society, who supervised Ahmed's study, said: "Ahmed employed his own creative methods to follow the trappers and traders without raising their suspicion, and for the first time in India, exact trade routes within and outside the country have been exposed."

Ahmed determined that wild birds are captured for at least seven reasons, which helps explain why the practice is so prevalent and difficult to halt.

Religious Bird-Release Business: Besides the usual practices of trapping birds as pets and for food, zoological and medicinal purposes, or taxidermy, Ahmed found that several species of birds that are poor candidates as pets and for consumption are often captured for the bird-release business.

This is an uniquely Indian religious tradition. Among Hindus, Jains, and a few other communities, there is a belief that releasing birds that are held in captivity can purify the soul and relieve personal sins.

On auspicious days, people go and buy these birds from traders for release. This has led to the development of an entire business around the religious custom. Species of wild birds that are unsuitable as pets or food are captured and brought near these holy places for the devout to purchase and re-release.

He also discovered that some important protected species like the horned owl [*Bubo bubo*] were hunted for black magic rituals and sorcery, such as the practice of certain tribes that use the owls to purify "amulets" during their street performances.

Finally, although the sport of falconry is now a vanishing art in India, a large number of wild raptors are caught every year to smuggle to the Middle East, where falconry is still popular.

Alarming Picture: While the problem of illegal trade in wild birds in India is widely apparent, Ahmed had a difficult time quantifying the number of birds affected each year. Yet even his best estimates paint an alarming picture.

A detailed analysis of water birds offers one example. In a survey Ahmed conducted in one market where water birds were traded, about a hundred birds a week were being captured and traded. With the waterfowl season lasting five months, this means that some 2,000 birds were being sold from a single marketplace in only one season. There are at least 20 such markets in northern India alone, which adds up to 40,000 water birds being sold in a single season.

Accurate figures on the capture of wild birds for local consumption are impossible to obtain because of the secretive nature of the practice. It's known, however, that species ranging from pelican to ducks and waders are caught for consumption.

Added to these huge losses are a large number of bird deaths during international transit. Ahmed estimates that for

every bird that reaches its final destination, two die en route. The mortality of wild birds during transit is thought to have increased since the trade ban was put into effect because of the extra efforts that are made to conceal the illicit cargo.

“Thanks to the ban, the trade in wild caught birds has now gone covert,” said Ahmed. “As a sad consequence of it, today the mortality of [wild captured] birds has gone up even higher.” [Pallava Bagla in New Delhi for National Geographic News, October 2, 2002.].

Kids for Tigers—Kiran Katikaneni

Sanctuary Asia in association with Britannia Industries launched a nation-wide program called **Kids for Tigers** in 1999-2000. The program was aimed at creating awareness and generating an active interest among school children on the wild heritage of India.

As part of the program 100 students selected from different cities met with the Prime Minister Vajpayee on January 18th 2002 to convey their concern and also show their commitment for the cause. 4 kids selected from different cities travelled to South Africa in May 2002 as part of an exchange program with the Kruger NP.

The program is now active in 12 Indian cities with 700 participant schools. It reaches approximately a million children between the standards III-VIII.

The program helps children grasp the dynamics of saving the tiger and its habitat in order to save the entire forest and the country's future ecological health. The tiger (our national animal) is an indicator species at the top of the food chain on whose survival the whole forest eco-system is intricately balanced.

A pre-workshop orientation camp for teachers was held on 30.vi.2002 at Geetanjali Devshala School and the

workshop on 27.vii.2002 at Chaitanya Vidyalaya and was attended by 44 teachers representing 24 schools. Sincere thanks are due to these school managements for their spontaneous support.

The year long contact program helps children learn the rationale behind protection of the tiger with the help of varied edutainment programs that include lessons, activities, projects, nature walk and culminating in a Tiger Fest, an inter-school get together scheduled in November. The program enables 8-10 selected students from Hyderabad to visit Bandipur Project Tiger along with their respective teachers in December. The selection is based on the child's active participation and any sort of creative contribution. In addition to this all participant schools (40) receive a one-year gift subscription of *Sanctuary-Asia* and 10 students from each school get a one-year gift subscription to *Sanctuary Cub*. One student will be named 'Tiger Ambassador' and will represent Hyderabad in the Ranthambore Tiger Mela scheduled for February-April 2003. There will be cash reward of Rs.1000/- for outstanding students, to enable them to buy wildlife books.

The highlights of the program are: 1). Designed by eminent academics in association with wild life experts. 2). Absolutely free of cost for the school managements. 3). The schedule is flexible and depends on the convenience of the school. 4). Excludes the higher classes keeping in mind their demanding curriculum. 5). Awards in cash and kind to encourage the kids' participation.

The Hyderabad Team leader is Kiran Katikaneni and is assisted by Nritunjuna (Ritu) Naidu, Krishna Priya and Imran Siddiqui, all active members of BSAP!

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—55

“Pictures are what the beginner requires; a few pictures are worth pages of description. In Europe and America, where Nature-studies have made such vast strides and have now such a general appeal, the demand has made it possible to bring out numbers of cheap natural history books with excellent colour illustrations.

In India this is not yet possible. The area is so great and the fauna and flora so rich and diverse that to describe them requires more space and wealth of illustration than in the West, while the public to purchase such books is much smaller and at present practically confined to the European population. It is however, to be hoped that educated Indians may turn more and more to the study of the natural wonders of their land.”

“This leads us naturally to the question of Geographical Distribution. No student of zoology can fail to observe that the fauna of the various portions of the world differ markedly in character in different areas.”

“The boundaries of the Western Palearctic subregion of the Holarctic region march with those of the Indian region roughly along the line of the Himalayas and the Afghan and Baluchi borders; and it must be remembered that the desert areas of the Punjab, Sind and Rajputana are part of the great Palearctic desert which starts on the Atlantic coast of North Africa and reaches the heart of China.

The Indian region needs to be further subdivided, as China and the Malays have characteristics that separate them off from India. India, Burma and Ceylon are usually considered as forming an Indian subregion, while the Himalayas are regarded as having closer affinities with China than with the Indian plains at their base.

The student of Indian ornithology must from the beginning realise that the avifauna of his area is not homogenous, spread over India evenly as butter on a slice of bread. He must obtain a conception of it as divided into sections. He must realise that the most comprehensive knowledge of the birds of Simla will leave him ignorant of the species that he will meet at Ootacamund, that the avifauna of the Sind desert has hardly a common feature with the avifauna of the forests of Malabar.

The most recent endeavour to express these differences is that of Blanford in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (Vol. 194, 1901, pp. 335-436). He divides India, Burma and Ceylon into five primary divisions as follows:

The Indo-Gangetic plain... (b) The Indian Peninsula, southwards of the above area... (c) Ceylon... (d) The Himalayas... (e) Assam and Burma...

These five subdivisions may again be further subdivided largely in accordance with the influence of rainfall, while along the Himalayas there are distinct altitudinal zones which affect the fauna. Those who are interested in the subject are advised to consult Blanford's paper in the original. It is too long to be quoted here, and its conclusions may have to be modified when the geographical races of Indian birds are fully worked out.”

"Finally, one must regard the influence of migration. The avifauna of India or of any square mile of it is never stationary, but changes season by season in response to the great tide of bird-life which sweeps across it with the regularity of the tides of the sea. The fundamental principle of migration is easy to understand. With the changing of the seasons a bird which summers and nests in northern latitudes is unable to find food in those latitudes in winter. It therefore moves southwards to an area that time and circumstances have fixed as its winter quarters. In the north the bird is known as a "summer visitor" and in the south as a "winter visitor," while in the intervening countries that it travels over it is a "passage migrant." The southerly route followed in the "autumn passage" is not necessarily the same as the route by which it returns north on the "spring passage."

India lies south of the great mass of Northern and Central Asia, where winter conditions are very severe following on a short but luxuriant summer. It is not strange, therefore, that a huge wave of bird-life pours down to winter in India where insect and vegetable food is so abundant. The movement starts as early as July, and reaches its greatest height in September; it crosses the Himalayas from both ends, and gradually converges down the two sides of the Peninsula spending its strength until it ends finally in Ceylon. In spring the wave again recedes, starting at the end of February, and all the migrants have gone by the end of May.

Ceylon is one of the few countries of the world that has no summer visitors, for it lies at the end of the migration routes through India, with no land of any size to the south of it.

The Indian winter, luxuriant after the monsoons, is more suitable to the needs of bird-life than the parched Indian summer. Geographical position and physical features, therefore, combine to account for one of the chief ornithological characteristics of India, that it is practically without summer visitors from beyond its borders. The few species that fall under this category are confined to North-western India, where they are able to take a route round the head of the Arabian Gulf to winter in Africa.

The effect of migration on status is most easily shown by an example. I will take a season in the Punjab and indicate the various categories of birds to be found in it.

There are first of all the Resident species, which breed there and remain the whole year round, such as the Parrakeets and Babblers. A few Summer visitors arrive to breed, such as the Purple Honey-sucker and Yellow-throated Sparrow. These, if they are late arrivals, dependent on monsoon conditions for their food-supply, are known as Rains visitors. But both Summer and Rains visitors have this in common, for the most part, that they are species which are residents farther south in India, *i.e.*, they are summer visitors merely in the northern part of their range in India and not, as our summer visitors in England, arrivals from distant countries. A very numerous class is that of the Winter visitors which breed north of India altogether, like the Waders and Ducks. No winter visitor arrives from the south. There are two more large classes, the Spring and Autumn Passage Migrants, such as Rose-Finches and Red-breasted Flycatchers, temporarily abundant on their way to and from winter quarters farther south in the Peninsula and Ceylon.

It must be remembered, however, that Nature is seldom clear-cut in her distinctions, and a species may fall under more than one heading. The mass of Red-breasted Flycatchers, for instance, that pass through in autumn and return again in spring, will leave a few of their numbers as winter visitors. Some individuals of another species may remain as residents while the remainder migrate.

The movements indicated above come under the heading of true migration, a tide which ebbs and flows year by year in response to the annual changes of the seasons. But they are supplemented by smaller and more irregular movements known as Local migration. These are due to different causes. In India the most frequent cause is variation in the rainfall and its consequent effect on food-supply. A prolonged drought will drive away the birds from a locality, good rains will fill it with birds where previously there were none.

Along the Himalayas and the neighbouring ranges there is a marked seasonal altitudinal movement, which moves the resident birds down through the various zones in response to the lowering of the snow-line. This, particularly in severe winters, sends a wave of stragglers into the plains of Northern India in January and February. A plague of locusts or an unusual crop of seeds may temporarily upset the usual distribution of several species. And finally the rudiments of local migration may be seen in the way in which some species shift their ground in a district while breeding. This movement may be very slight, merely a matter of a few miles, yet it is of interest as showing the evolution of the great migrations from hemisphere to hemisphere.

At present we have practically no detailed knowledge on the subject of migration in India, whether true or local; records and observations on it are badly needed."

"The wonderful avifauna of India is still unspoilt and almost in its entirety. Let us chronicle and appreciate it while we may and endeavour to return to awake an appreciation of its value and interest so that steps to preserve it may advance *pari passu* with the destructive influences. These have already started. The irrigation of vast tracts has already made considerable changes in the fauna, the interesting desert forms giving place to less specialised and widely common birds. With the passing away of the Arms Act one of the greatest barriers to the wasteful destruction of bird-life by ignorance and greed has been broken down, at the very moment when the opening up of the country by the motor-car has lessened the number of natural sanctuaries. So in return for the interest of your study of the Indian avifauna, endeavour to protect it and awaken public opinion to the task." [Hugh Whistler, 1928, *Popular Handbook of Indian Birds*, pp. xxi, xxiii-xxvi, xxviii]

Whistler had formed a good idea of the "pattern" of Indian bird-life in his 17 years of service as a Police Officer in India, mainly in the Punjab (then undivided) and other parts of the north-west. To be able to understand our species limits and their life-cycles and movements across space, it is highly imperative to be yourself a "resident" of this very diverse and interesting sub-continent for a long time and slowly get to understand this sub-continent's geology, relief, climate, flora and fauna. No book can teach you this and it must be learnt through time and lots of fieldwork, combined with reading pertinent basic literature on taxonomy, field biology and ecology, besides biogeography. Occasional "visitors," like the birders who are now writing guide books and instructing trained artists to paint them, have a natural handicap and this must be realized by one and all. Sālim Ali was a self-made field ornithologist (not so much an ecologist, really) and had acquired an excellent "feel" of our bird-life, but, his penchant for taxonomy was feeble and he was lucky to have had the expertise of Whistler (and then Ripley, who was no comparison, an "occasional visitor") available to him during his initial forays into bird surveys of the Indian Princely States funded by the then Rajahs and Nawabs and also sponsored by the incomparable Bombay Natural History Society, and his photographer-businessman refugee friend from Singapore, Loke Wan Tho.

What I quote of Whistler above should form every Indian sub-continent bird watcher's "10 Commandments." Let me expand on these commandments one by one, but in brief, owing to lack of space.

1. First, do not imagine that this sub-continent can be understood for its birds or biodiversity so easily and quickly. Like Whistler wrote, this land is too "rich and diverse" to be comprehended without long years of learning, *tapasya* and *riyaz*, with a prayer in your heart and "madness" in your brain. Being a convent-school educated Hindoo-born, with wonderful Muslim friends, I am a blessed "triumvirate" Indian—who else can be one?

2. Second, think physical, not political, when looking at ranges and distributions of bird species (of course of other animal and plant taxa too). You will comprehend them better.
3. Do not expect even commoner bird species to be the same all over this sub-continent. A Himachali, like Whistler had warned, will be “all at sea” encountering a Tamilian’s Nilgiris avifauna for the first time, and a Sindhi birder (Indian or Pakistani) will need the help of a local “*Mallu*” when searching for birds in Kerala.
4. The “five primary divisions” of Blandford are similar, but not exactly what I have delineated as the major biogeographical areas of this sub-continent. Peninsular India and Ceylon, Central Highlands, Plain of the Indus, Gangetic Plain, Assam-Burma, Eastern Himalaya, Western Himalaya, Baluchi-Afghan Hills, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and the Laccadive-Maldives-Chagos Archipelagoes. Each of these areas “may again be further subdivided largely in accordance with the influence of rainfall” (*vide* Whistler) and have been “dissected” by me into smaller, biogeographically homogenous sub-areas and sub-sub-areas (see my Map in Letter # 44 in *Pitta* 122-123, June-July 2001).
5. Our bird fauna is not mostly resident and breeding, but also influenced by the regular arrival and departure of between 300 and 400 species of migratory birds which fly in by September and fly out from February. Though this annual true migration into India and back, or through Pakistan or Burma to either Africa or the Malay Archipelago, is still poorly understood, the winter or cold season is when bird diversity is at its maximum here.
6. But this is not the only movement that Indian Ornithology exhibits. There is also plenty of local movement whose “most frequent cause is variation in the rainfall and its consequent effect on food-supply.” Bird watchers’ “first records” of unusual species turning up in areas away from their normal ranges are mostly based on such vagrant or stray incidents, and local bird movements need more detailed study.
7. The status of a bird species in different sub-areas or sub-sub-areas is not fixed as “resident” or “visitor” (summer or winter or on passage) but needs to be carefully analysed in each. Breeding of a species, regularly, in the same area is actually the best proof of its “resident” status. This aspect of our bird life, nidification, has received comparatively little attention ever since the commendable compilations and summaries of Hume (& Oates) and Stuart Baker. Besides his worthy studies of the Baya Weaver, even Sālim Ali did little to document the nesting of our birds.
8. Latitudinal or longitudinal movements of birds are not the only such mobility exhibited by them. On great mountain chains and massifs, like our Himalayas, or the higher hill ranges like Western Ghats or the Naga-Arakan Yomas, there is considerable altitudinal activity connected with the seasons. Careful taxonomic research has shown that speciation has occurred at different altitudes just like it has over latitudinal habitats made disjunct through evolutionary time. What I am now theorizing about our several so-called “subspecies” actually being real species, inhabiting such disjunct or specialized latitudinal or altitudinal habitat niches, can be put forward as the following equation:
9. $RIP + BAR = RS$ (Reproductively Isolated Populations with Biogeographically Allopatric Ranges make Real Species).
10. The rich and wonderful avifauna of our sub-continent is now experiencing “destructive influences” like Whistler noticed 75 years ago. Conversion of immense land areas into agroecosystems to feed, clothe and produce natural raw materials for an irresponsibly overbreeding, and over-consuming, human species has been most deleterious to indigenous fauna and flora. Being an agricultural research scientist, I believe that farming here should have continued to be “natural” and not be modelled on that in the United States where mechanization, and large-scale farming technology, with massive use of pesticides and inorganic fertilizers has ruined beautiful ecosystems and pushed their indigenous fauna and flora to extinction. Irrigating deserts and damming magnificent rivers and not using the rainwater that pours for a full 4-7 months, or tapping the massive solar energy that bathes our land almost all year, is, to me, simply “suicidal,” if not irrational and daft!
11. The other factors that have proved a threat to our wildlife were also pointed out by Whistler as being the relaxation of laws on the possession of firearms and also “the opening up of the country by the motor-car [which] has lessened the number of natural sanctuaries.” Bird watchers accustomed to outings only around urban areas or in disturbed habitats modified by farmers or loggers, really cannot have any idea of what a perfect, classical (if I can use this word) natural habitat of a truly wild species is, or should be! That is why our Protected Areas and natural vegetation types that still exist, away from the haunts of a rapidly urbanizing and “americanizing” local human, are like the Taj Mahal or the Koh-i-Noor Diamond, or, simply, like the yellow metal (gold), which must be protected by force—a “Forest Protection Force”—which is our only hope to save “God’s creations” that have evolved here through millennia. Amen!

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & <flycatcher@eudoramil.com>

North American Ornithological Conference—*Suhel Quader*

Every few years, individual ornithological societies in North America join together to have a combined meeting instead of conducting separate annual meetings. The third such meeting, called the North American Ornithological Conference, was held in New Orleans, USA, between Sept 24 and 28, 2002. Societies from Canada, the USA, the Caribbean, and Mexico participated. About 1500 people from NGOs, academic institutions, and government agencies in North America and elsewhere participated. There were about 800 scientific presentations (lectures and posters) this year, in 5-7 concurrent sessions. But why should birdwatchers from the Indian subcontinent care about a North American conference?

Firstly, researchers often seek generality in their work, and results obtained in one part of the world may be of interest back home. For example, B. Sigel presented results of a 20-yr study of birds at the La Selva biological station in Costa Rica. Over this time, the area around the field station has been deforested. Simultaneously, insectivorous birds have declined in number while omnivorous species have increased. Sigel suggests that insectivores are most vulnerable to the effects of habitat fragmentation. S. Coe was interested in the effect of water availability on the breeding of desert birds. When she provided water to Blackthroated Sparrows in the Mojave Desert, she found no changes in hatching success, chick mass, or chick survival. Thus, desert-adapted species seem to do quite well without supplementary water, at least in the short term. Similar evaluations of expensive water supplementation schemes in our part of the world need to be carried out. P. Arcese presented evidence that brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds increases the extinction risk of Song Sparrows on islands by

increasing the degree of nesting failure. There were many sessions on avian systematics. K. McCracken analysed the DNA of herons and egrets, and showed that both Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus*) and Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*, formerly *Egretta alba*) are more closely related to the genus *Ardea* than they are to *Egretta*. Finally, a curious result. Analysis of the DNA of various raptors indicates that harriers (*Circus*) and hawks (*Accipiter*) are each others' closest relatives. Indeed the conclusion of C. Griffiths was that harriers are actually *Accipiters*!

A second reason to be interested was a workshop of direct relevance to Indian birds. "Conservation of *Gyps* vultures in Asia" brought together a variety of biologists interested in this problem. One of the reasons recent vulture declines have attracted international concern is that, if the cause is a communicable disease, it may well spread to *Gyps* species in Africa and Europe. Munir Virani presented the results of a 2-yr study on nesting and mortality of the White-backed Vulture in Pakistan (Punjab province) and in southeastern Nepal. The number of active nests declined from 2430 to 778 over the study period. Of 151 nests monitored closely, 96 failed, most during the incubation period. An increase in pesticide use in Pakistan (organophosphates and pyrethroids) has coincided with vulture declines, but whether this is the cause of the population crash is not yet known. Debbie Pain described the patterns seen from vulture censuses conducted in the early 1990s and again in 2000 over a large part of India. Data from road transects (>10,000 Km) and counts at carcass dumps indicate that there has been an overall decline of 96% in the population of *Gyps*, but the population of Egyptian vultures (*Neophron*) seems stable. Less than 5% of roadside carcasses were attended by vultures in 2000. Examination of 30 vulture corpses revealed evidence of enteritis (inflammation of the intestine), visceral gout (deposition of uric acid crystals around the internal organs), vasculitis (inflammation of the blood vessels), and the inflammation of glial cells in the brain. An aviary and a laboratory have been built in Haryana for further work. Lindsay Oaks presented evidence for the existence of a previously-undescribed *Mycoplasma* bacterium from dead *Gyps* vultures from Pakistan. Unfortunately, it is not yet clear whether this microbe actually makes vultures ill, and we still await good evidence of the cause of the precipitous decline in *Gyps* vultures.

FIELD CRAFT: WAGTAILS (*Motacillidae*) By Bill Harvey

Six species of wagtail occur in India and in the case of three of them, several well-marked races, or possibly incipient species, have been recorded. This month's title feature focuses on those three species although the other three species are illustrated. Note that many females and immatures are difficult to identify sub-specifically, so this note concentrates on adult male plumages.

At least six races of White Wagtail have been reported from India. *Alboides* (Illus., 1) is one of the two black-backed forms (the other is *leucopsis*) and can always be separated from the larger, resident White-browed Wagtail *M. madersapatensis* (Illus., 2) by its white forehead and thinner calls. This latter species is the only black and white wagtail with broad white supercilia. *Alboides* breeds in Kashmir and other parts of the Himalaya and winters commonly in northern India. Of the four grey-backed forms, *personata* (Illus., 3) and *dukhunensis* (Illus., 4) are illustrated. Both winter widely in India and *personata* breeds in the extreme Northwest. It is similar to *alboides* but with a grey mantle. The very rare *ocularis* has black stripes through the eyes. *Dukhunensis* is the palest and greyest and the plate shows a male in winter plumage. In breeding plumage the chin is black. Note in all the White Wagtails there is less black on the head in non-breeding plumage. The race *baicalensis* is very rare and shows a white chin in all plumages. White Wagtails are usually found in damp areas or near water but they are also partial to short-grass lawns and even paved areas such as forecourts. They often roost in large flocks in reed-beds mixing with other wagtail species.

Three races of Citrine Wagtail, *M. citreola* (Illus., 5), occur in India and two are illustrated here. The nominate race *citreola* has a grey back and a broad black collar. It breeds in central and northern Asia wintering throughout most of India. The black-backed race *calcarata* (Illus., 6) breeds in Kashmir and winters in the northern half of India. The race *werea* (not illustrated) is like a pale *citreola* with a narrow collar. While all the adult males have completely yellow heads making them instantly separable from the Yellow Wagtail group *M. flava*, females and immatures can be more problematic. They tend to be greyer with more obvious white wing-edgings but the most consistent feature is the long supercilia that curl right round the ear coverts. A female *calcarata* Citrine is also shown. The calls of Citrine Wagtails are distinctly harsher than those of the Yellow group. They also tend to be even more restricted to aquatic habitats in winter, often feeding out on floating vegetation such as water hyacinth beds.

The Yellow Wagtail group is the most complex and, depending on whether you included some races as variants of others, at least seven races occur. None breed in India but some races are common and widespread winter visitors. All adult males have yellow underparts and greenish backs with white edged wings and tail. The dark blue-grey crowned race *thunbergi* is illustrated (#7) and it and the pale-blue crowned *beema* are probably the commonest races wintering in India. Note that *thunbergi* usually shows contrasting darker grey ear coverts and some individuals show some white in their supercilia. These are sometimes treated as different races e.g. *zaissanensis*, *simillima* or *plexa*. Other races have green (*taivana*), whitish (*leucocephala*) or yellow crowns (*lutea*). In all cases the females and immatures are much paler with greenish crowns and straight supercilia. A female *thunbergi* is illustrated. Two races have black crowns and are the most likely candidates for specific status as their calls are subtly different and the females and immature show very little yellow. The race *melanogrisea* (both male and immature illustrated, #8) has a solid black crown and nape while superciliaris has thin white supercilia. Yellow wagtails like damp pasture and crops or short grass wetlands. They frequently feed close to grazing cattle, Nilgai and buffalo, catching the insects disturbed by their hoofs. They are noticeably sociable and it is possible to spot more than one race feeding together, particularly during the autumn and spring passage seasons.

The remaining two wagtail species are the very long-tailed, grey and yellow Grey *M. cinerea* (Illus., 9) and the strangely patterned Forest *Dendronanthus indicus* (Illus., 10). In breeding plumage the male Grey has a black throat and in all plumages the yellow is mainly restricted to the lower belly and vent. It breeds in the northern mountains and winters throughout India, usually singly or in pairs, by fast flowing streams and barrages. Its hard "zit zit" call is distinctive. The Forest Wagtail also tends to be seen singly. Both sexes are pale grey-brown above and white below with strikingly black and white wings and double black breast bands. It is a bird of damp forest floors with minimal undergrowth, not necessarily near water and often flushed from paths in open forest. It has a strange habit of swaying its tail and

lower body sideways (not up and down like other wagtails). It winters sparsely in southern India and the extreme Northeast and has bred in Assam. However passage individuals could be picked up almost anywhere.

October is a good month for passage wagtails (though March-May is even better when many returning birds will be in fresh breeding season). They are usually not difficult to observe closely and it would be of interest to many in our group if the different races (where possible and relevant) could be reported. We still do not know enough about wintering ranges and relative abundance and we know next to nothing about any variations in habits.

[This article has been taken from the website of the Delhi Bird Group, www.delhibird.org. The sketches by Sachin Jaltare, featured here, are from photographs (on the website) from the forthcoming *Photographic Guide to the Birds of India* - Bikram Grewal, Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister. The Book is due to be published later this year.].

1. White Wagtail *Motacilla (alba) alboides* (Otto Pfister).
2. White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis* (Otto Pfister).
3. White Wagtail *Motacilla (alba) personata* (Otto Pfister).
4. White Wagtail *Motacilla (alba) dukhunensis* (Otto Pfister).
5. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla (citrea) citreola* (Otto Pfister).
6. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla (citrea) calcarata* male & female (Otto Pfister).
7. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) thunbergi* male & female (Nikhil Devasar).
8. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) melanogrisea* male (Otto Pfister) & female (Nikhil Devasar).
9. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (Otto Pfister).
10. Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* (Otto Pfister).

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Madhapur

9.vi (C.T. Hash): INDIAN ROBIN CB, N with 2 eggs inside cement block, turned on end with the rear of the holes sealed.

Nehru Zoological Park

15.vi (C.T. Hash): RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, ad., with yng.; WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER CB, ad., with yng.; COPPERSMITH BARBET (entering nest hole)

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (C.T. Hash)

14.vi: DARTER NT* 1; CHESTNUT BITTERN 1; COOT CB, ads., & imm.; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO C, 3; BAYA WEAVER PRB, const., N.; BLACK-BREASTED WEAVER PRB, M collecting N-mat.; BLACK DRONGO CB, ad., feeding fledged yng.

15.vi: TAWNY EAGLE PRB, F on N; BLACK-WINGED STILT ads., & 4 imm.

16.vi: LITTLE CORMORANT BR+, CATTLE EGRET BR+, MEDIAN EGRET BR+, PURPLE MOORHEN CB, ads., with downy yng.; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING CB, downy yng., with 2 ads.; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, ads., with downy yng.; INDIAN RIVER TERN CB, 7 ads & 1 imm.; BLUE ROCK PIGEON CB, on N; STREAKED WEAVER PRB, const. N.; BAYA WEAVER PRB, const. N.

23.vi: GREAT CORMORANT (immatures accompanying adults) DARTER NT* 1; PURPLE HERON PRB, on N; MEDIAN EGRET Br+; CATTLE EGRET BR+; PAINTED STORK NT* CB, 10 ads., with 14 imm.; TAWNY EAGLE PRB, on N; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, 2 eggs in N; RIVER TERN PRB, 9 ads + 2 imm.; BAYA WEAVER PRB, M const., N; STREAKED WEAVER PRB, attending N.

7.vii: DARTER NT* 1; GREY HERON 40+ 60; MEDIAN EGRET BR+; CATTLE EGRET BR+; PAINTED STORK NT* 30; SPOT-

BILLED DUCK 200+; TAWNY EAGLE CB, imm., exercising in the monsoon breeze by jumping into the air above its nest and flapping its wings; COOT CB, downy chicks with ads.; RED-WATTLED LAPWING CB, downy chicks with ads.; GREEN SANDPIPER 2; ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE CB, ads., & 2 large yng.; BRAINFEVER BIRD calling, and mobbed by HOUSE CROWS; WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER CB, ad., & imm.

MAHABUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Farahabad (R Mathew)

27.vii: GREATER GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER.

30-31.vii: CRESTED SERPENT-EAGLE, CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE, PEREGRINE FALCON, PAINTED SPURFOWL, GREY JUNGLEFOWL, EMERALD DOVE, GREEN IMPERIAL-PIGEON, CRESTED TREE-SWIFT.

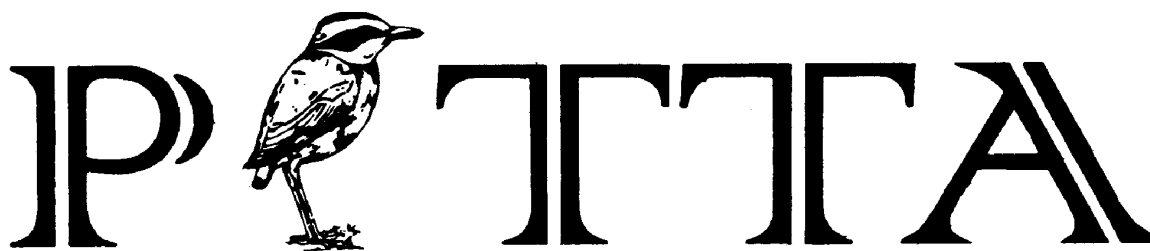
1-4.viii: PEREGRINE FALCON, ALPINE SWIFT, CRESTED TREE-SWIFT, YELLOW-FRONTED PIED WOODPECKER, GREATER GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER, INDIAN SCIMITAR-BABBLER.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Ordinary=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 139: November 2002

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5) (vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 1-xii-2002: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District: At 692msl, and part of the Anantgiri Reserve Forest block, Anantgiri is famous for its TB sanatorium and salubrious climate. There will be a rash of warblers and other passerine migrants. A bonus might be the resident pair of Crested Hawk-Eagles that nest in an Eucalyptus plantation. Other attractions are Orange-headed Ground-Thrush, White-eye, Fantail Flycatchers, Golden Oriole, *etc.* **Route:** Mehdiapatnam—Tipu Bridge at Artillery Centre—Chilkur—Moinabad—Vikarabad—Anantgiri. Distance is about 60km from the city. Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am and assemble near temple at Anantgiri. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads at 5.45am. This will be a full-day trip. Carry water and food if you plan to stay the day. For directions and further information contact Siraj Taher (6612608) or Shafaat Ulla (3353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-xi-2002, 6pm: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

The trip to Yaparla, Mahbubnagar District

Ranjan Mathew

I was very excited about this trip. We started from Panjagutta at 6:45 a.m., even though the planned departure was 6. The drive was good, thanks to the excellent highway and the few species of birds we saw along the way. The first stop was at Jadcherla, for breakfast (*idlis*, *dosas* and *puris*), the next, Yaparla. We had to detour from the highway onto a 'kuchcha road'. It was now that the landscape underwent a great change. Green fields and open grassland spread as far as the eye could see. Common Swallows were darting around over the fields. Yaparla was a smallish village still not affected by pollution or population. All the houses were mainly made of thin stones neatly piled up in rows. Most of the houses had electricity, which they tapped illegally by means of a hook thrown over the overhead cables!

On reaching, a small bird was seen on a nearby tree and proved to be a Yellow-throated Sparrow. My first! We thankfully dumped our bags in Mr Pratap Reddy's (our host) house and headed for the Krishna River, after experiencing stares and glares from all the villagers. I couldn't blame them. How often would they see a fleet of cars filled with people wearing hats and carrying binoculars? And to top it all was Mr Moorthy looked like an explorer straight out of a *National Geographic* documentary! Along the way we spotted a herd of Blackbuck. A Black-shouldered Kite was also seen in its familiar position, hovering in one place.

The river was a sight. The level of water had dropped considerably due to lack of rains. High above an Egyptian

Vulture soared and was joined soon after by a juvenile. Far away, a white-coloured harrier flew, which Mr Raajeev Mathew promptly identified as a Montagu's, after merely glancing at it. The river sported quite a number of water birds. An Osprey was spotted in a majestic pose across the river. As it was being watched through the scope, waders (Common Sandpipers and a Common Greenshank) were identified along the shore close by. A pair of Small Pratincoles flew by and one settled on a sandbar in the water. A Western Marsh Harrier, identified by its whitish head and brown body, surveyed the water. A Little Cormorant was seen far away. Suddenly all attention was shifted to some wagtails which had just landed a few feet away. There were Grey Wagtails amidst a few Large Pied Wagtails. Three birds of prey were sighted far away along the water line. Mr Raajeev Mathew and Mr Moorthy identified them as a marsh harrier, and two Greater Spotted Eagles. A Lesser-Spotted Eagle [Eds: Indian Spotted Eagle, see elsewhere in this issue] was also sighted. A great sighting! A bigger herd of blackbuck was seen, this time with 2 males and 5 females. A Rufous-tailed Finch-lark was seen blending beautifully with the ground. Common swallows were everywhere.

We then gratefully went to a sumptuous and delicious lunch, cooked in Mr Pratap Reddy's backyard. Afterwards we heaved ourselves, unwillingly, into the car for another session of birding. This time we were headed for the Venkatapuram Lake. However we stopped along the way, and an eager Sushil uncle informed us that there was a tank full of ducks waiting for us to scan. The majority consisted of Common Pochards, a Comb Duck and a few Eurasian

Wigeon. A Darter was spotted flying with pinpoint precision along with a couple of Brahminy Kites. A few Northern Pintails were also seen. By the time we left the lake it was getting dark. Many thought it was absurd to try and go to a lake several kilometres away to watch birds. However the troop proceeded. Other than the 7 Open-billed Storks we saw along the way, the lake was practically empty. Dinner...welcome and delicious!

6:30 a.m.: After breakfast we left for Kollapur, in the foothills of the Nallamalai Range. The spot we chose was approximately 50 kms away, according to Raajeev uncle's G.P.S. We walked through dense forest and saw many woodland birds, mostly raptors. Just as we came out onto the road a Black Eagle was seen majestically soaring overhead—much to Kiran's delight. Back in Yaparla a scrumptious lunch awaited us. On the way back to Hyderabad, our Qualis took a small detour to look for the icing to top our cake. At the Venkatapuram lake we saw a great number of terns—Whiskered and River. Many waders skulked in the marshy areas. All endings are sad, but that was that! Living in stone-wall establishments, among farmers and villagers, far away from modern amenities, was a whole new experience for me.

Visceral gout in Vultures

“I am writing as a member of The Peregrine Fund's Asian Vulture Crisis Project working on the widespread mortality of vultures in the Indian subcontinent. Our work is continuing in Pakistan, India and Nepal, where our studies are now entering a third breeding season. The bulk of our work has been conducted in Pakistan, where the largest remaining colonies are now found. A summary of our work and findings can be accessed on our website: http://www.peregrinefund.org/conserv_vulture.html.

“Acute visceral gout has been a recurrent finding during necropsy of vulture carcasses in Pakistan, with reports of further cases in India. Visceral gout is an end stage condition that is known to follow a range of metabolic, infectious, toxic and dietary disorders that result in a failure in kidney function. Histopathology of the vultures examined has revealed an acute necrosis of renal tubules, with no other consistent findings in birds dying with the condition. To date we have been unable to identify any proximate cause for the renal pathology and visceral gout in vultures examined.

“I am interested to hear from other researchers and veterinarians with experience in the post mortem examination of Gyps and other Old World vulture species. I am aware of a number of published and unpublished reports of sporadic cases of visceral gout in vultures from Israel, Italy and Austria. However, have been unable to find any information indicating the frequency with which this condition is encountered in countries outside south Asia, or any details clinical history or diagnostic findings in such cases.

“Dehydration is often cited as a common cause of visceral gout in avian species. We have considered the potential involvement of dehydration as a prequel to visceral gout in the vultures, but now consider this very unlikely. Although rainfall does vary dramatically with season (largely concentrated in the monsoon months of July through September), water remains available at each of our study

colonies throughout the year. Seasonal temperature fluctuations in the region are extreme, with summer temperatures exceeding 40°C on a daily basis. Despite such high temperatures and the associated elevation in dehydration potential, our findings have shown that gout is no more prevalent during the hot season. Juveniles fledging at this time are likely to be even more susceptible to dehydration (given the conditions and the naivete of this age class). Yet the incidence of visceral gout in newly fledged juveniles has been lower than that recorded for adult birds (19% and 44% in juveniles during the post fledging period in 2001 and 2002 respectively compared to 80% and 83% for adults).

“There has been much discussion on the role of infectious agents in the vultures within south Asia. There are a number of known pathogens that have been implicated in the development of visceral gout (eg. certain strains of avian influenza, and infectious bronchitis virus), however, assays have failed to identify the presence of any suspect viruses or bacteria. Thus far we have been unable to culture any potential pathogens from vulture tissues, and have found no lesions on histopathology that are indicative of an infectious agent. Although we do not have any findings that support the involvement of an infectious disease we remain open-minded, and will continue to investigate this hypothesis.

“The potential foraging range and feeding habits of *Gyps* vultures are likely to lead to exposure to a variety of toxins. Analysis of tissue samples for toxic levels of arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury have been negative. Other commonly used environmental contaminants and pesticides are not normally associated with renal disease and visceral gout. One exception to this is the nephrotoxin DRC-1339 (Starlicide) used in the control of avian pest species. However, despite extensive enquiries within Pakistan, this compound does not appear to be used within the country.

“Organophosphates are extensively used in the Indian subcontinent, particularly on cotton. The quantity and frequency of applications have increased markedly in recent years, and OP consumption has more than tripled in the last decade. However, visceral gout does not fall within the traditional lesions of OP poisoning, and it is difficult to theorize a mechanism through which it might lead to the development of visceral gout. We have largely excluded the involvement of acute OP toxicity, but continue to explore the possibility of more chronic effects.

“I would be very interested to hear from other researchers with experience in the post mortem examination of vultures, particularly on the incidence at which visceral gout is encountered, and any diagnoses that have been reached on the predisposing factors. In addition I would also welcome any thoughts on novel or unusual causes of visceral gout in any bird species, particularly if a number of birds were affected.” —**Martin Gilbert** MRCVS, BVMS, Field Veterinarian, The Peregrine Fund. [Jevgeni Shergalin on <OrientalBirding@yahoogroups.com>].

The **Oriental Bird Club** is pleased to announce that the OBC Image Database is now fully functional. This is the first serious online attempt to database images of birds found in the Oriental region. We hope that this growing, free to access collection of photographic images of wild birds from the Oriental region will prove a useful reference tool for

researchers, as well as a highly enjoyable and interesting browsing experience for birders.

All images in the Database are generously provided by the photographers free-of-charge, in furtherance of the aims of the OBC. The OBC is very grateful for their contribution. The photographers retain copyrights of the images. You must obtain their permission if you wish to use any of the images. For contact details and other information about the photographers, click on the 'Photographers' button in the Database.

The development and maintenance of the OBC Image Database is sponsored and hosted by www.Indiabirds.com and the OBC extends its gratitude for their warm generosity.

The ultimate aim of the OBC Image Database is to assemble images of all of the species in the Oriental Region in one archive. If you think you can help by contributing photographs of species which are not yet in the Database, please email one of the Imagemasters listed below.

Whilst every effort will be made to keep the Image Database as accurate as possible, errors do occasionally creep in to any large project of this kind. If you think there is a mistake in identification or information, please contact the Imagemasters. While we believe that all species in this Database have occurred naturally in the wild within the Oriental region on at least one occasion, we do not guarantee that they have all been accepted by the various countries' rarities commissions.

Please visit the OBC Image Database at <http://www.indiabirds.com/obc/Default.asp>. [Tom Tarrant <aviceda@hotmail.net.au>, Vijay Cavale <vijay@indiabirds.com>, Krys Kazmierczak <krys@krys.net>].

"The **White-necked Stork** is called 'Vakil Kotty' locally (in **Kerala**), as it resembles a lawyer in black gown." —C. Sashi Kumar on <keralabirder@yahoogroups.com>.

Ecological Task Force helps restore Bhatti mines

The 132 Infantry Battalion (Ecology) of the Territorial Army is presently working on the restoration of the mines in the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in Delhi. The forest that is being resurrected in the Bhatti mines is to be called the Kargil Martyrs' Memorial Forest. It has been reported that one lakh saplings have already been planted in the last one year and an additional one lakh saplings will be planted in the period upto March 2003. A corpus of Rs. 8.23 crores has been created which is to be disbursed in the next five years. The entire expenditure incurred by the battalion will be eventually reimbursed by the Delhi Government, which will also provide expertise and saplings. Currently 141 retired personnel of the Rajput Regiment are planting between 3,000 to 3,500 saplings a day and have a survival rate of 67%. A team from Delhi University headed by Dr. CR Babu is also providing expertise for growing grass around the saplings to help retain moisture. [Cecil Victor. "No more haze over Bhatti mines," *Tribune*, 19/9/2002. (Contributed by Kalpavriksh on <nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU>)].

1 in 4 bird species in U.S. declining or at risk of disappearing

More than one in four U.S. bird species is declining in numbers or at risk of disappearing, according to a new report from the National Audubon Society.

The bird conservation group estimates that 201 species in the continental United States, Hawaii and Alaska are menaced by habitat destruction, pollution, diseases and other threats.

Among the most imperiled is the short-eared owl, which has seen a nearly 70 percent population decline since the 1960s because of grassland destruction and the ingestion of poisoned mice and rats, Audubon spokesman John Bianchi said Tuesday, when the report was released. There are perhaps 100,000 short-eared owls left in the United States, he said.

The cerulean warbler, a deep blue bird once found throughout the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys, has suffered a more than 70 percent decline, and it's unknown how many are left, Bianchi said.

The birds' conditions, worrisome on their own, should be taken as a broader indication of the health of the country's ecosystem, despite successes such as the recoveries of the bald eagle and peregrine falcon, the group said.

"Birds warn us about disease, and birds warn us about the quality of our coasts and our oceans and our forests," Audubon science director Frank Gill said at a Manhattan news conference releasing the group's "Watchlist 2002."

The 600,000-member National Audubon Society was founded in 1905 to protect birds and their habitats.

Audubon officials urged people to cut back on pesticides and other poisons and to use more native plants in their yards, providing more food and shelter for birds.

"We can't take the birds that we know so well for granted," Gill said.

The Audubon Society assessed the more than 800 types of birds ordinarily found in the United States.

The Audubon endangered list contains about twice as many species as the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

Jeff Wells, the society's bird conservation director, said that political disputes among environmentalists, federal regulators and other interest groups kept many worthy species off the U.S. list.

A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service spokeswoman had no immediate comment. [Michael Weissenstein, Associated Press Writer, October 23, 2002; submitted by Stan Moore <hawkman11@hotmail.com>]

New treecreeper species

A new species, the Sichuan Treecreeper *Certhia tianquanensis*, has been described from western Sichuan, China, by Martens and co-workers in the *Journal für Ornithologie* 143: 440-455 (2002).

The Sichuan Treecreeper was originally regarded as a race of the Eurasian Treecreeper *C. familiaris* although it is not closely related. Like its nearest relative, the Brown-throated Treecreeper *C. discolor* of the Himalayas and Indochina, the Sichuan Treecreeper has a long tail. However, Sichuan differs from Brown-throated in its striking voice, short bill, underparts patterning and DNA profile.

Of concern is that the species is apparently very local within a small geographical area, and last century many of its probable high altitude coniferous forest habitat was extensively logged. One of the species's known localities is destined for tourism development through construction of a cable railway. [Dr Richard Thomas <richard.thomas@birdlife.org.uk> on <orientalbirding@yahoogroups.com>].

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—56

“We are all agreed that certain recent surveys, particularly those of the Americans and Germans, have been examples of how *not* to go to work. They send a collector to an area and their aim is simply accumulation of a vast number of specimens, largely in order to get new forms and to get duplicates for exchange. They make no endeavour to furnish information of general or biological interest, they teach us practically nothing and their reports are merely critical remarks on skins. The result has been chiefly discredit. I want you to work on much more general and useful lines and I know that is your own particular bent. You are a biologist and not merely a dry-as-dust closet worker, so I feel sure that we see eye to eye in this matter.

First of all we want actual specimens (1) for identification of the forms which occur in the state (2) in corroboration of your field notes (3) for record and comparison with specimens in other areas (4) for studies of plumage and moult...”

“On arrival at camp you want to study a large-scale map very carefully and see what types of terrain are in the vicinity. Most birds are distributed according to terrain—especially the more interesting ones—so if you only go the same old round again and again you will miss half the interest of the neighbourhood. The map will show you perhaps that in one direction there are low rocky hills, in another an open wide river bed, two miles off is a large *jheel*; a reserved forest and open cultivation fill in the other areas. Each of these terrains will hold certain special species in addition to the generally adapted forms which are capable of flourishing in all the types of terrain. It is important therefore to establish for each camp (1) which species are able to flourish throughout the area (2) which species only inhabit certain parts of the area. You are then in a position to start to establish the biological factors which are responsible for the differences of distribution...Each type of terrain requires to be worked until you are satisfied that you know all about its inhabitants. Watching and thought are of as much importance as killing...Round your camp in a five mile radius you will perhaps find 4 forms of Lark irregularly distributed. Now there must be an explanation behind the irregularity of their distribution. Its ultimate basis is probably food, but food will express itself in external form—one lark may be confined to black cotton soil; another may need open ground under *sal* trees; a third may only be patchy because from some ecological reason it is numerically scarce and so there are not enough individuals, and its numbers never increase, to populate the region. . .”

“We want some hint of the factors which induced their comparative abundance and their difference in distribution. That is what should lie behind ornithology—the specimens and the correct name should only be a means to an end.”

“All the time ask yourself the question WHY. Why is the distribution patchy? Why is the bird in the sandy dry river bed and not in the cultivated plain alongside? Why is it in the roadside avenue and not in the forest? And why has it special modification?...”

“Let your notebook be just as important a your gun. I should recommend you to keep several notebooks. First of all you should have a large general diary to be kept day by day after the lines of those kept by Hume in his Sind trip (Vol. I *Stray Feathers*) and Scully in his trip to Eastern Turkestan (Vol. IV *Stray Feathers*). This will describe the localities, terrain, chief forms met, with special points of interest. At the end of the Survey it can then easily be polished up as an introduction to the Survey report.

“Then I personally keep another notebook under species heading. This I run through daily noting each date and place where each species is met with and all points of interest. Each new species is given a space and heading as it occurs. Running through the pages daily serves to ensure that nothing is forgotten...”

“Then I should keep a small notebook for soft parts of specimens. Do not write the colours of soft parts on the labels. With each fresh species obtained start a separate page for it in a notebook: write down very carefully the soft parts of the first specimen with the serial number of the skin...”

“Don’t trouble to measure birds in the flesh. It is however of interest to weigh the larger forms.

Your labels should give information on the following points (1) The state of the organs (2) State of skull (3) Fat (4) Moult.

Regard correct sexing as the most important part of the preparation of the specimen...”

“...Mark the presence of incubation patches. Say if shot actually *off* a nest—we don’t know which sexes incubate the eggs.”

“Presence of fat in excessive quantities shows that the bird cannot be breeding and that it is probably on migration...”

“I should like you to pay a good deal of attention to food, not of course the hackneyed remark ‘insects’ or ‘seeds’, but to any special foods which are obviously being favoured by particular species and which may help to explain their distribution...”

“You will say to yourself in reading all this long farrago that there is nothing new in it and that all the directions are obvious. I agree, but my experience is that 9 out of 10 collecting trips and collections lose a huge proportion of their value from a neglect of these obvious details. Carry them out and we shall be able to write a first class report on the birds of Hyderabad State which will be of far more than local interest.”

[Hugh Whistler in Salim Ali, 1985, *The Fall of a Sparrow*, pp. 235-239]

Xeric and/or mesic ecosystems? Coastal areas, plains, plateau, foothills or mountain top? Time of the year and amount of rainfall received in the previous months? Forest type and geological formations? Is this an area which has been worked previously for its birds or not? What biogeographical sub-sub-area(s) does it represent? Are there any endemics known from this area of survey? These and a few other questions need to be put and answered by any responsible bird watcher who intends carrying out a survey of the Ornithology of any particular biogeographical sub-area or part of it. If the idea is to make a “list” (besides just names one must also annotate each such “list” with bio-ecological notes) of the bird species of a town and its surrounds, or of a political Taluka or District or State, it is critical to understand all of the forest types that exist here and which biogeographical sub-sub-areas occur within these political boundaries. If the target area has no previous published bird paper/note, find out if there are such from adjacent areas or anywhere else from the larger unit to which this belongs, political or biogeographical.

This Letter introduces another unit for targeting studies of bird *etc.* diversity – the “quadrant” or what is included in a 1° latitude/longitude square, which is approximately 100km or 70 miles each way. The map included here shows the quadrants over our sub-continent and also those where authentic records of what should be the “State Bird” of Andhra Pradesh, Jerdon’s Double-banded Courser, emanate from. In a subsequent Letter next year I will include another map, which will present such quadrants over biogeographical areas. As an example of what one quadrant includes, the BANGALORE one (12-13°N, 77-78°E, marked ‘B’ on map) has, besides this now extremely overpopulated and polluted metropolis, also Magadi, Huliurdurga, Ramanagaram, Anekal, Bannerghatta Park, Hosur, Maddur, Channapatna, Kanakapura, Denkanikota, Malavalli, Shimsha, Cauvery Sanctuary, Anchetti, Kollegal, Yelandur, and Pennagaram as the major urban locations and two PAs. This quadrant has a maximum altitude peak of 1514 metres a.s.l., and the rivers Cauvery, Arkavati, Kanva, Chinnar, Ponnaiyar and Shimsha flowing within this area. Knowledge of the geology, soil and vegetation type(s) in each quadrant will also prove useful in a

final analysis of its ornithology, entomology or whatever. Likewise, the HYDERABAD quadrant (17-18°N, 78-79°E, marked 'H' on map) includes also Secunderabad, Sangareddipet, Patancheru, Narsapur, Medchal, Bhongir, Golconda Fort, Farrukhnagar, Ibrahimpatan, Shamsabad, Cherial and Jogipet. The maximum altitude peak in this area is 706m a.s.l., and the rivers Manjira, Musi, Haldi and Kudaliyar flow here, besides the presence of three large tank bodies—the Himayat, Husain and Osman Sagar dams.

A hundred square kilometres (each quadrant's limits) will include plenty of habitats, even if spatially small and remote (thankfully "unknown" still to urbanites) and these are what must be visited in each such area and documented for the avifauna, for at least 5 but preferably 10 to 20 years, to really understand their biodiversity. There are about 600 quadrants that cover the Indian subcontinent; 327 are over mainland India, approximately 86 over Pakistan, 79 Afghanistan, 76 Burma, 20 each over Nepal and Bangladesh, 10 over the Andaman—Nicobar Islands, 6 Laccadives, 14 Maldives, 5 the Chagos Archipelago, 7 over Sri Lanka and 3 over Bhutan. What I am looking for now is a single MHP ("Mixed Hunting Party") volunteer each, to accept responsibility for working at least one quadrant, of his/her choice, to survey and document data on its bird diversity and bio-ecology (also insects and other wildlife!) for the next 20 years, if possible, as my maximum requirement. The "Peninsular India+Ceylon" biogeographical area has a total of 90 quadrants and I aim to start this massive compilation task, and resolve, from here, and then go north—from the ancient to the recent. To supervise these 600± MHPs I would also need, from 36 to 50 PECs (Panel of Exploring Conductors) to analyze databases of each biogeographical sub-sub-area, like for example the Deccan Plateau or the Assam Valley or the Western Himalaya. I will then be able to pool all this massive database, old and new, and upload it, scientifically whetted and analyzed, for final output as a projected 20 volume work (1,000 pages each covering 100 species) to be published as the 3rd revised edition of the FAUNA OF INDIA, BIRDS between the years 2017 and 2026. That is the "big picture" plan and I will be pleased to welcome serious volunteers (as MHPs or PECs) whom I could 'train,' and then work closely with, over the next two decades on a comprehensive, well analyzed, documentation of our rich, but still poorly known avifauna.

Dr Harish Gaonkar, who works in Copenhagen (Denmark) and London (England) introduced me to this quadrant idea for recording exact distributional records of butterfly species on which group (Rhopalocera : Lepidoptera) he is a leading expert of from our sub-continent. In an interview published in Down to Earth (February 15, 1996) he says about the current state of India's environmental affairs that:

"Lack of knowledge, in my view, is the primary reason for the biodiversity crisis in India. When one cannot relate to the biology of a species, it is not possible to protect it because one would not even know how it disappeared. Indians today have an interest in birds, which is almost entirely attributable to Salim Ali. But even in this case, the knowledge is simply documentary, and not evolutionary or ecological."

His excellent researches on butterflies in the field, museum and library has led him to conclude that the quadrant that includes the Idukki area in Kerala is perhaps the richest 100 sq.km. area (for butterfly diversity) in peninsular India. This WORLDMAP project he is involved with is, I believe, an important venture to map distributions of flora and fauna based on documented databases, and to be added to by future focussed and scientifically supervised field/museum/library research. Such accurate mapping will be more real than the "wash" technique employed in recent field guide books of the "Grimskipp," Kazmierczak and their artists. Gaonkar's butterfly quadrant mapping shows, that north of Goa the butterfly diversity suddenly lessens. However, I am suspicious of this and my own field work indicates that this result may probably be owing to significantly less sampling, faulty taxonomy, and minimal documentation done on the "*Sahyadris*" of Maharashtra and Gujarat (the Dangs). Likewise, the entire "Central Highlands" biogeographical area, from the Kathiawar peninsula and the Aravalli Hills across the Vindhya and Satpuras to the Chhota Nagpur plateau (Jharkhand), down to Bastar and the extremely interesting and little studied "Vizag Ghats" (these are not the Eastern Ghats but the Central Highlands!) have a rich biodiversity that has not been properly explored, even by the British, and thus are insufficiently sampled, possessing a fauna and flora related also to that on the Himalayas! It is the ancient Peninsular India which has sourced the recent fauna and flora on the eastern Himalayas, the Naga Hills—Arakan Yomas and the Western Ghats, and not *vice versa*!

We in this sub-continent have approximately 10% of world biodiversity and its richness is scarcely understood and publicized, which is a great pity. Our working taxonomists are dwindling and conservationists are playing with really incomplete and misunderstood, poorly analyzed, insufficient data, and incorrect species limits, and so-called catchwords like "hot spots," which, to me, unfortunately show a partiality to recently evolved species "explosions" and incorrectly placing lesser "value" on the really important older geological and geographical "spots" with fauna and flora that have sourced these recently formed ecosystems and have a much longer survival record. We are talking about good genes, not a multiplicity of chromosomal re-combinations. Quantity is not greater than quality.

What we need to do, with the help of a newly formed "Forest Protection Force" (like the Border Security Force!) is to strictly conserve and restore at least 10% of our land area (with help of trained scientists and foresters, not biology-unsavvy "conservationists!"), as our PAs (Protected Areas—Biospheres, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries), carefully selecting and notifying unique ecosystems that are still undisturbed, or only marginally so, as "out-of-bounds-PAs." Conserving our biodiversity is actually, I believe, a simple and straightforward action plan to be executed on a war footing. Protect the ecosystems (jungles, marshes, grasslands, semi-deserts, scrub-and-boulder country, mangroves, sholahs, mountain streams and valleys, backwaters, lagoons, most Himalayan high altitude habitats, *etc.*, and prohibit the entry of unauthorized humans. Like my "Guru" M. Krishnan opined in an issue of the B.N.H.S.' Hornbill before he died, we Indians should leave at least 10% of our national territory alone for our wildlife and try to utilize the remaining 90% for our needs, to be comfortable and live

happily. This “sustainable development” slogan should be discarded, and a “sustainable lifestyle” one adopted if we are to live within our means and not over-exploit Nature or ourselves!

[**Errata:** Letter 54 – *Pitta* 137, Page 4, Para 2, Line 3, should read “Himalaya mountains”; and the penultimate Para, Line 2, should read “Mrs Gould’s Sunbird.”] **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, c/o Azman Farm, Doddagubbi P.O., Bangalore 562 149 & flycatcher@eudoramail.com.**

Redefining an Eagle—Suhel Quader

In this column Suhel Quader <suhelq@ufl.edu> reports on recent papers on Indian birds, published in international journals that are relatively inaccessible to local birders.

Parry, S.J., Clark, W.S., and Prakash, V. 2002. On the taxonomic status of the Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata*. *Ibis*. 144: 665-675.

Much ink is spilled and many tears shed by taxonomists arguing whether to split subspecies into full species or lump different species into subspecies of a single species. Why should the rest of us particularly care one way or another? Conservation provides one reason. When attempting to conserve biological diversity, we must often set priorities. One way to do so is to consider evolutionary distinctness. Particularly unique and distinct organisms are given highest priority. For example, according to this hierarchy, each of the many individual subspecies of the Eurasian Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) would be given less conservation importance than the Brahminy Myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*), which is not divided into separate subspecies.

Recently, there has been some rearrangement of the taxonomy of the Indian *Aquila* eagles, with the separation of the Tawny and Steppe Eagles (*Aquila rapax* and *nipalensis* respectively) into distinct species. S.J. Parry, from The Natural History Museum, U.K., and colleagues now suggest a similar split in the Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*), which has two subspecies – the migratory *A. p. pomarina* of western Eurasia and Africa, and the resident *A. p. hastata* of the Indian subcontinent. Although *pomarina* and *hastata* were originally described as separate species in the 1830s, Ernst Hartert classified *hastata* as a subspecies of *A. pomarina* in the first quarter of the 20th century, and this convention was followed by James Peters in his influential *Checklist of the Birds of the World*.

Parry and co-authors revisit this issue by presenting observations and measurements on hundreds of specimens of *pomarina*, and *hastata*, as well as the closely related Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*). They show that *pomarina* and *hastata* differ considerably in plumage. *A. p. pomarina* has a pale head contrasting with darker back, a yellow or amber iris, and a rufous patch on the neck. *A. p. hastata*, on the other hand, has head and back uniformly dark brown, a brown iris, and no patch on the neck. There are also clear differences between these taxa in measurements of the skull and beak. But these differences in themselves are not evidence that *pomarina* and *hastata* should be different species – after all, subspecies within a species differ in some respect too.

The clearest evidence that *pomarina* and *hastata* should be different species comes from a comparison with *A. clanga*. The most striking difference is in the width of the gape, which is greatest in *hastata*, intermediate in *clanga*, and smallest in *pomarina*. Because *hastata* and *pomarina* are less similar to one another than each is to *A. clanga* (a different species), all three should be considered separate species. The Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*) is then distinct from *Aquila hastata*, for which the authors suggest the English name 'Indian Spotted Eagle'.

Why does *A. hastata* have such a large gape? According to the authors, one possibility is that a large mouth allows the birds to hyperventilate at the nest, where temperatures often exceed 45°C. In contrast, temperatures at *A. pomarina* nests are usually under 35°C. Another hypothesis is that the differences in gape size are related to the type and size of prey. Whatever the reason, the gape of *Aquila hastata* has not only helped restore it to species status, but should also aid in the field identification of this species in all plumages. The gape of *hastata* extends well behind the eye, whereas that of *clanga* (and *pomarina*) does not. So if you see a spotted eagle, and manage to get close enough, you may very well find that you are looking at *Aquila hastata*, an endemic of the Indian region and freshly restored to species status.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Ramchandrapalem (Garapadu) [K. Mrutyumjaya Rao]

10.viii: ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 350.

Uppalapadu (K. Mrutyumjaya Rao & Ramana Kanaparthi)

2.viii: SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 21; DARTER NT* 8; BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON 300; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 8,000, N activity; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 1,800.

10.viii: BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON 300; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 8,000, CB, 1,000+ N; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 2,000, CB, 150+ N.

11.x: SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 120; DARTER NT* 4; BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON 300; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 8,000, CB, 800 N; GLOSSY IBIS 700; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 1,200.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (C.T. Hash)

27.x: BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON CB, ad., & imm.; COMB DUCK; SPOT-BILLED DUCK CB, ad., with yng.; NORTHERN SHOVELLER 1,000+; NORTHERN PINTAIL; MARSH HARRIER; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU*, 2 juv.; COMMON KESTREL; INDIAN PEAFAWL CB, ad., with imm., M in non-br., plm.; SPOTTED REDSHANK; COMMON GREENSHANK; COMMON SANDPIPER; BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER; EUROPEAN ROLLER;

BROWN SHRIKE; COMMON STONECHAT; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary (Heinz Lainer)

20-21.ix: MONTAGU'S HARRIER 3 M, 1 F; EUROPEAN ROLLER 1; RUFOUS-TAILED SHRIKE 1st winter.

MAHABUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Vyaparla (Raajeev Mathew)

26.x: DARTER 1, NT*; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS 8 NT*; GREATER FLAMINGO 51; EGYPTIAN VULTURE 1 juv.; WESTERN MARSH-HARRIER; PALLID HARRIER; MONTAGU'S HARRIER; INDIAN SPOTTED EAGLE; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE VU*; OSPREY; BLACK-TAILED GODWIT; WHISKERED TERN; SYKES'S CRESTED LARK.

Kollapur (Raajeev Mathew)

27.x: BLACK EAGLE; BOOTED EAGLE; CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE; YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL, VU*; INDIAN SCIMITAR-BABBLER.

NELLORE DISTRICT

Pulicat Lake (Heinz Lainer)

23.ix: SPOT-BILLED PELICAN VU* 300+; PAINTED STORK NT* 500+; EURASIAN SPOONBILL 100+; GREATER FLAMINGO 4,000+; LITTLE STINT c. 1,00,000; CASPIAN TERN 14.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Gachibowli, EPTRI Campus (Rajashekar Tummala)

29.x: PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD sipping nectar from *Acacia farnesiana* and *A. arabica* inflorescence; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, M collecting green reeds of *Cynodon dactylon* and entering *Pandanus odoratus* clump.

GOA

NORTH GOA (Heinz Lainer)

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary

19.v: MALABAR GREY HORNBILL CB, M feeding walled-up F.

Ciba-Geigy

26.v: PURPLE HERON CB, 25+ N occupied; LARGE EGRET CB, 51+ N occupied; LESSER ADJUTANT-STORK 17; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT*, 89.

Cumbarjua Canal

13.x: COLLARED KINGFISHER 11+.

SOUTH GOA (Heinz Lainer)

Cabo de Rama

13.viii: PEREGRINE FALCON 1 ad.

Dudhsagar Top

22.iv: INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 1; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL 2; MALABAR PIED HORNBILL NT* 1; GREAT PIED HORNBILL 3; INDIAN BLUE ROBIN 1 M, 2 F; WHITE-BELLIED BLUE-FLYCATCHER 1 M, 2 F.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

GKVK Campus (S. Subramanya)

27.vi: PARIAS KITE CB, N on Casaurina with 1 full-grown chick; WHITE-HEADED BABBLER CB, N with 5 yng., within canopy of *Polyathia longifolia*.

10.vii: SPOTTED OWLET CB, 1 nestling, fallen from N, being mobbed by Jungle crows.

BELLARY DISTRICT

Hampi (Heinz Lainer)

18.ix: YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL VU*, 4.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST

Pitta

"Finally a few words about the *Pitta*. Recent research reviews are very informative and interesting. Dr. Kumar Ghorpade's 'LETTERS' and the selected abstracts present in it are well written. However, I feel, he is repeating the same ideas or facts which he have (*sic*) already said in his previous letters." —**Zaibin AP.**

"I hope *Pigeon Post* has not been discontinued? In fact it should be allotted one full page for original or reproduced articles/article which make pleasant reading. You could stipulate the length (words) so as to fit two brief pieces on the page." —**Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh.**

Birdwatching

"My naughty sister, Jahnavi, and I came for birdwatching with my mummy and papa to Hyderabad University on Sunday, 29 September 2002. There were so many uncles and aunties. It was very *dhupi* (sunny) and hot. There were some friends also. Jahnavi played in the mud and became dirty. Murthy uncle gave me a very big yummy sandwich to eat. I love birdwatching. I saw many birds, especially near the lake. A weaver bird was making its nest. Kingfisher was sitting on a tree near the water waiting for a fish. A dabchick was swimming with its two small babies. So cute no! One bird was singing. I could not see it. Raajeev uncle told me it was an Iora. I saw the birds I am writing here: cormorant, kingfisher, coot, nakta, dabchick, little egret, small green bee eater, spotbill, iora (h), drongo, weaver." —**Devika S. Kapadia.**

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A. Taher (6612608) **Website:** <http://www.bsaponline.org> **E-mail:** aasheesh@vsnl.in
Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

**Honorary Secretary's Report presented at
the 22nd Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh,
held on 14-10-2001—for the year ended 31-3-2002**

Ladies and Gentlemen: Good Evening!

It gives me great pleasure to present you with a report of the happenings in our Society for the year ended 31st March 2002.

During the year members made field trips to the following 10 sites: Sanjivayya Park, Nehru Zoological Park, Chilkur Mrugavani, Moinabad Kanchas, Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park, University of Hyderabad, Narsapur Reserve Forest, Shamirpet Lake, Rourial Tank, Pargi Wetlands and, Anantgiri Hills.

The following programmes were held at the indoor meetings of the Society:

1. A quiz was organized for members by Mr J.V.D. Moorthy on 16th April 2001.
2. Illustrated talk by Dr C. Tom Hash on birdwatching in the Eastern Ghats, on 21st May 2001.
3. Talk by Mr. Raajeev Mathew on the Western Ghats, on 18th June 2001.
4. Illustrated talk by Mr Stephen Parr, of the RSPB, on the endangered Seychelles Magpie-Robin, on 28th June 2001. He also presented a copy of BirdLife International's monumental two-volume *Threatened Birds of Asia*, to the Society.
5. Film show, on 16th July 2001.
6. Film show, Life of Birds, on 20th August 2001.
7. Discussion on Society matters, programmes, etc., on 17th September 2001.
8. Annual General Meeting on 15th October 2001.
9. Film show on 19th November 2001.
10. Film show on 17th December 2001.
11. Discussion on SACON project, on 21st January 2002.
12. Film show on 18th March 2002.

Besides these, members of the Society went on an Annual Camp to Horsley Hills, in Chittoor district from 1-4 November 2001.

Eleven copies of *Pitta*, the Society's Bulletin, were produced during this period, with a combined issue being published for June-July 2001. Two volumes of the Society's journal, *Mayura*, comprising Vol. 14 (1&2) for 1997 and Vol. 15 (1&2) for 1998, were published during the year on 30.8.2001 and 15.2.2002 respectively. An International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), ISSN-0972-5415, was obtained for *Mayura* during the year. This was assigned by the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre, New Delhi, vide their letter no. NSL/ISSN/INF/2001/02, dated 23rd August 2001. The cover of *Mayura* was changed from the matt red to a glossy white and a black and white reproduction of Sachin Jaltare's *Indian Mynas* was published on the 14th volume. The 15th volume reproduced his House Sparrows, on its cover, in colour.

BSAP members participated in SACON's Inland Wetlands of India project. 40 wetlands were covered in Andhra Pradesh by members of the Society.

Donations were received during the year from Mr K.C. Ramakrishna (Rs1000), Mr Aasheesh Pittie (Rs500) and Messers Azad Reading Room (Rs3000). I take this opportunity to thank all of them for their support.

On behalf of the Society and on my personal behalf I would like to especially thank the following for their help and encouragement in more ways than one.

1. Sachin Jaltare for his continued support with his talented artwork for our publications.
2. Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé, Siraj A. Taher and, Suhel Quader for contributing columns for *Pitta*.
3. The principal, management and staff of Vidyaranya High School for providing space for and cooperation during our indoor meetings.
4. The Chief Wildlife Warden, A.P. Forest Department and his team for their cooperation and forthright help whenever we required it.
5. Dr. C. Tom Hash for arrangements at ICRISAT.
6. Mr. P. Rambabu for secretarial help.

The Executive Committee would also like to thank all members for their support and participation in the activities of the Society. Thank You.

BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH
P.O. BOX 45, BANJARA HILLS, HYDERABAD 500034

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31-3-2002

LIABILITIES		Amount Rs.	ASSETS		Amount Rs.
<u>Capital Fund:</u>		2,16,598.63	<u>Cash at Bank:</u>		1,38,350.43
Opening Balance	1,31,531.50		HDFC Bank	9,625.00	
			Canara Bank	1,28,725.43	
Life Membership	30,000.00		<u>Fixed Assets:</u>		7.00
Surplus	65,208.50		Binoculars (4)	4.00	
	2,26,740.00		Slide Projector (1)	1.00	
Less: Deficit	10,141.37		Telescope (1)	1.00	
	2,16,598.63		Tripod (1)	1.00	
			Cash on hand		590.92
			Fixed Deposit – HDFC		70,000.00
			TDS – HDFC Bank Ltd.		7,650.00
		2,16,598.63			2,16,598.63

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31-3-1999

EXPENDITURE		Amount Rs.	INCOME		Amount Rs.
<u>Printing & Stationery:</u>		45,812.00	<u>Subscriptions:</u>		14,215.00
Stationery, etc.	17,374.00		Ordinary	12,800.00	
Printing – Mayura	16,160.00		Student	740.00	
Printing – Pitta	10,448.00		NRI	675.00	
Printing & publication	1,830.00		<u>Other Income:</u>		1,92,570.00
			Admission Fees	1990.00	
Postage Charges		18,706.00	Bank Interest	8,386.00	
Miscellaneous Expenses		1,636.00	Donations	4,080.00	
Caps & T-shirts		1,904.00	Sales—T-shirts	1,800.00	
Bank Charges		127.00	Sales—Caps	104.00	
Stipend		3,200.00	Sales—Reports	745.00	
Interest Charges		1,600.00	Stickers	50.00	
Rent		1,200.00	Mayura Journal	415.00	
SACON Project Expenses		67,392.00	Professional Fees	1,75,000.00	
Excess of Income over Expenditure		65,209.00			
		2,06,785.00			2,06,785.00

Sd/-

Sd/-

Sd/-

For Gandhi & Gandhi
Chartered AccountantsSiraj A. Taher
PresidentAasheesh Pittie
Honorary SecretarySushil D. Kapadia
Honorary Treasurer Sd/-Ramkumar
Partner

IPTTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 140: December 2002

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 22-xii-2002: Rourial Tank, Rangareddi District: Route: Charminar—Barkas—Pahadi Shareef. After 12-13 km, take the first left turn after Pahadi Shareef and drive on for 5km for the tank which is on the right side of the road. Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads at 6.15am. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (6612608) or Shafaat Ulla (3353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

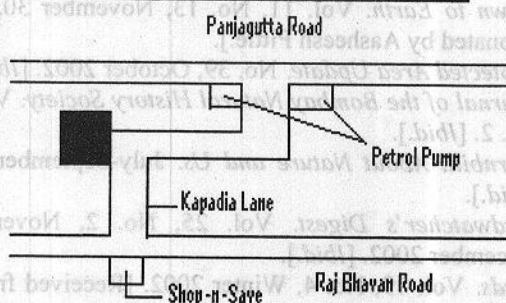
INDOOR MEETING: 16-xii-2002, 6pm: Slide show by K. Subramanyam, Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP Blast!

BSAP is arranging an evening of fun, frolic and food for members, family and friends, at 7pm on Saturday, 11 January 2003 at the residence of Sushil Kapadia. His house is on Kapadia Lane, between the two parallel main roads of Panjagutta-Khairatabad and Raj Bhavan Road. Wholesome vegetarian food will be arranged. Contributory participation is Rs150 per head (Guest Charges: Rs. 150/- per head; Children below 12 years Rs. 100/-). Registration closes 16.xii.2002 though payment can be made on 11th January evening. Cancellation of booking is not allowed for obvious reasons. For information contact Sushil Kapadia (R: 23393968 O: 24756798). Please participate whole-heartedly with family and friends and make the event a mega success.

Road Map to Sushil Kapadia's house



BSAP Camp in Eastern Ghats (Vizag Hills) 6-10 February 2003

A 3-day 4-night camp is being organised to a few places in the Eastern Ghats from 6-10 February 2003. Participants will leave on Thursday, 6th evening and return on Monday, 10th

morning. Contribution per head will be Rs. 2,000/-. Participation is restricted to 15 due to limited accommodation at APTDC's complex at Tyda. Children below 12 years will not be allowed. Kindly reserve your place at the earliest to avoid disappointment. Last date for booking is 11th January 2003. Cancellation charges will be 50%. Please contact Shafaat Ulla to book or for further details, at 23353098 / 23234153.

A Tradition of Burning Weaver Bird Nests

In almost every village of North Karnataka, including Koppala, on a particular Thursday (this time on Thursday, 21-11-2002) village youth go out in groups to collect weaver bird nests. In the process birds are chased, eggs destroyed and at night youth of these villages go round the village holding the burning nests in their hands! This act supposedly prevents thieves from entering the village!

This cruel act has one story (as most superstition does) that long ago thieves, on being chased by villagers, took refuge under thick bushes. As it was already night, people lit these nice nests and caught them! So every year this event is being commemorated by collecting weaver bird nests from trees and burning them! [K.S. Naveen, K.R. Krishnaprasad, Prahlad on bngbirds@yahoo.com].

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus superciliosus*, a new record for India

"We have some exciting news to share. Earlier this year, two Calcutta based birdwatchers Sumit Sen and Sujana Chatterjee saw and photographed the *superciliosus* race of the Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*. We believe that this is a new record for India.

"As they put it 'Two birds were observed next to a ploughed dry paddy field. The birds were using available perches including dried twigs and Plantain leaves. Very un-cristatus like perching behavior with the body stretched to the full and open gape [as in the image (<http://www.kolkatabirds.com/exhibit3.htm>)]. Overall looked very different from *cristatus* and was seen at a time when it is not seen in our area.' More pictures can be viewed at other details seen at <http://www.kolkatabirds.com>.

"Norbert Lefranc, the international authority on Shrikes has the following to say, 'I have examined the photos of the Brown Shrike. The rufous colours on the upper-parts as well as on the underparts and the wide white frontal patch all strongly suggest *superciliosus*. As far as I know, this would be the first record for India. I have only seen nominate *cristatus* in the field (in India and Nepal), but I have examined plenty of *superciliosus* in museums.'

"Craig Robson, author of *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia* adds, 'It certainly looks like *superciliosus* to me, and also matches the description in "Shrikes". This race breeds in Japan and mainly winters in the Sundas. The furthest west that it seems to have been recorded to date is south Yunnan, S. Thailand and Sumatra. Being such a long distance migrant however, one would expect odd records further west.'

"We would like to congratulate Kolkata Birds on this significant discovery." [Nikhil Devasar <delhibird@yahoo.com>].

"A quick note to say that a BNHS specimen from Bihar was identified as *superciliosus* by Dr. Ripley's lab some years ago, but was lost in the mail on the return trip to Bombay (see BNHS catalogue 20) [Abdulali, Humayun (1977): A catalogue of the birds in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society-20. Laniidae, Oriolidae, Dicruridae, Artamidae. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 73(3): 491-515. (1976)—Editors.]. Hence, assuming the specimen was correctly identified as *superciliosus*, there is one previous record. [Pam Rasmussen <rasmus39@MSU.EDU>].

HARRIER COUNT AT ICRISAT

10 members (Tom, Kulkarni, Kiran, Shoba, Krishnapriya, Nandu, Prakriti, Prashast, Paarth and Aasheesh) participated in a Harrier *Circus* sp. census at ICRISAT Campus on 23rd November 2002. Starting at 5.30pm, they stood spaced out at 500m from each other, along the western boundary of the campus, and counted the birds as they came in to roost in the grass. Some individuals were already on the ground when the volunteers reached the area and a few kept trickling in from the west and north. In a span of 15 minutes, however, from 5.45-6.00pm, the number of birds gliding in zoomed! Given some overlap and the vast area of suitable habitat that was not covered, the total of 438 birds seems quite tenable. Species seen were Western Marsh-Harrier *C. aeruginosus*, Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus* and, Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus*. The wild grass areas in ICRISAT host a significant population of roosting harriers and could be the second largest known roost in Andhra Pradesh, after the one at

Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary where over 1,000 birds roost in winter. Another census is planned on Sunday, 16th February 2003, for which volunteers are required. Please give your names to Aasheesh Pittie (23350683 / 56551961).

ROLLAPADU REPORT 8-10 November 2002

Dr S. Bhargavi and Dr C. Srinivasulu continue their bi-monthly census of the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* at Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary. This BSAP project is sponsored by the Important Bird Areas programme of the Bombay Natural History Society. A brief report of their 3rd visit is given below.

"One female Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* was observed incubating an egg on 8th November. In the evening of 9th November, nine individual bustards were seen feeding in two flocks. One group consisted of 2 individuals (1 male and 1 female), while the other of 7 individuals (1 male and 6 females). We received a phone call the day before (19.xi.2002), from Adisheshayya, stating that another female had laid an egg on the 11th of this month, just one day after we returned from our trip."

The next census will be on the 2nd Saturday-Sunday weekend of 11-12 January 2003. Members interested in participating should contact Aasheesh Pittie (23350683), well in time to make necessary arrangements.

OBC Small Grant for Telugu Pitta

BSAP has been awarded a Small Grant of £625/- by the Oriental Bird Club, towards production of the *Pitta* in Telugu. A thousand copies of this bi-monthly bulletin will be mailed free to schools and junior colleges throughout Andhra Pradesh. We would like to take this opportunity and thank OBC for their support.

Books & Journals received

The BSAP reading room received the following books and journals / periodicals during October-November.

Book:

1. Karanth, K Ullas (2002): *The Way of the Tiger. Natural History and Conservation of the Endangered Big Cat*. Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bangalore. [Donated by Dr Ullas Karanth.].

Journals / Periodicals

1. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 11, No. 13, November 30, 2002. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
2. *Protected Area Update*. No. 39, October 2002. [*Ibid.*].
3. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. Vol. 99, No. 2. [*Ibid.*].
4. *Hornbill. About Nature and Us*. July-September 2002. [*Ibid.*].
5. *Birdwatcher's Digest*. Vol. 25, No. 2, November / December 2002. [*Ibid.*].
6. *Birds*. Vol. 19, No. 4, Winter 2002. [Received from the R.S.P.B. in exchange of *Mayura*.].

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—57

"...The subspecies, or geographic race, is a geographically localized subdivision of the species, which differs genetically and taxonomically from other subdivisions of the species...For the sake of completeness, I shall add Rensch's definition (1934) [Kurze Anweisung für zoologisch-systematische Studien, Leipzig—K.G.]:

A geographical race is a complex of interbreeding and completely fertile individuals which are morphologically identical or vary only within the limits of individual, ecological and seasonal variability. The typical characters of this group of individuals are genetically fixed and no other geographical race of the same species occurs within the same range.

"The term *group* is most commonly applied to an assembly of closely related species of a genus. But it is also applied to subspecies in species with many subspecies...The word *complex* is frequently used synonymously with the term *group*.

We are now ready, after having treated all the other categories, to discuss the most important one of all, the species."

"...Darwin said in 1859: "In determining whether a form should be ranked as a species or a variety, the opinion of naturalists having sound judgement and wide experience seems the only guide to follow." This is a species definition ["The practical species concept"—K.G.] which would still find favor, in a slightly modified form, among a good proportion of the working systematists of today ..."

"...Stresemann (1919: 64) [Verh. Ornith. Ges. Bayern, 14: 39-74—K.G.] stated it [The biological species definition"—K.G.] in these words: "Forms which have reached the species level have diverged physiologically to the extent that, as proven in nature, they can come together again without interbreeding."

"A biological species definition, based on the criterion of crossability or reproductive isolation, has theoretically fewer flaws than any other. In practice, however, it breaks down just as quickly...As long as populations are in contact with one another, it is generally not difficult to arrive at a decision as to whether or not they are conspecific; the isolated forms are the ones that puzzle us."

"WE HAVE SPOKEN of geographic speciation, up to this point, as if it were the only way by which new species can originate. This is correct for birds, so far as we know, and may have something to do with the fact that in birds the species, as such, is a very homogenous and natural phenomenon. The species of Australian or of North American birds, of mountain or of lowland birds, of terrestrial, fresh-water, or oceanic birds, the species of humming birds or of vultures, all of them are, biologically speaking, comparable units. There is no certainty that all other animal species can be considered as strictly equivalent to the species of birds."

"...If we are trying to find an antithesis to "geographic speciation," it cannot be "genetic speciation" or "ecological speciation," because these categories are not contrasting; in fact, they are largely overlapping...The opposite of geographic speciation, e.g., speciation without geographic isolation, a process which might also be called "sympatric speciation."

"In birds, sibling species are not very common. Sympatric species are generally sufficiently different to permit easy recognition. Among 568 species of New Guinea birds we might quote the following as sibling species...Altogether the sibling species comprise less than 5 percent of the New Guinea bird fauna. In Europe and North America all the cases of sibling species among birds were cleared up more than forty years ago, and it is only in the tropics that such difficulties still exist...Sibling species in birds involve nearly always dull-coloured forms. They are encountered only very rarely in genera containing species that are not only very bright and colorful but also possessing complicated color patterns. It was found recently (Mayr 1940c) [Ibis (14) 4: 712-722—K.G.] that the common minivet *Pericrocotus "brevirostris"* of the taxonomist (from India, Thailand, Indochina, and south China), consists really of two species. These brilliantly colored birds had been studied by the leading ornithologists of the world, but all of them had been deceived. The differences between the two species (*brevirostris* and *ethologus*) are quite slight...Ticehurst (1938b) [Ibis (14) 2: 93-94—K.G.], discussing the similarity of two such sibling species, the babblers *Garrulax pectoralis* and *moniliger*, writes:

These two species afford one of the most remarkable cases of parallelism in ornithology. Apart from two small characters, the difference between the two is of size, the largest *moniliger* practically overlapping the smallest *pectoralis*. If the two were separated geographically they would at once be considered races of one species [emphasis mine—K.G.]. Yet so far from being separated geographically they are not even, like some closely-allied species are, separated by difference in terrain; indeed, where one is found the other frequently is also, even in the same hunting party. Their nests, habits, eggs, courtship, and terrain are identical; they share the same ecological niche. Furthermore, when the form of one changes geographically—as it does in southern Burma, *pectoralis* to *meridionalis*—*moniliger* changes to *fusca* in the same area, and the differences between these races and the typical forms are the same in both species—the substitution of buff-coloured tips to the tail for white. Farther east in Indo-China the forms are again changed, and both tend to show the same differences—a darkening and saturation in colour. Yet it is quite clear that we have here two species. I have never seen a specimen which was not definitely one or the other and, moreover, in parts of the distribution of the two the status is by no means equal, the one or the other being much more the commoner..."

"On account of the excellent progress made in recent years, there are only a few avian genera left (for example, the cave swiftlet *Collocalia*, with about 16 species) in which the species have not yet been completely analyzed. Considering that there are about 8,500 species of birds in the world, the number of "difficult" species is so small that it does not amount even to one percent. The eventual elimination of all such cases may perhaps be considered the most tangible result of taxonomic work."

[Ernst Mayr, 1942, *Systematics and the origin of species from the viewpoint of a zoologist*, pp. 106, 108, 115, 119-120, 186-187, 200-202.]

Yardstick—a standard for making a critical judgement, or a comparison. Philip J. Darlington, Jr (1970, *Systematic Zoology* 19: 1-18), in his “A practical criticism of Hennig—Brundin ‘phylogenetic [*sic!*] systematics’ and antarctic biogeography” ended his important paper as follows:

“Henning and Brundin accuse non-cladist systematists of being ‘typologists’...To the extent that cladists more than most of us try to force real evolutionary and biogeographic situations to fit oversimplified and distorted idealizations, it is they who are the typologists. (But the worst typologists of today seems to me to be persons who make mathematical models of populations or of evolutionary processes, and then proceed as if the models were real and nature must fit them. The mathematical models are immensely useful tools, but they should not be substituted for reality).”

What then is “reality” and what can we assume to be real species? Species “concepts” were theorized to find a yardstick, a standard that could be employed to compare different distinct populations and suggest what were most likely real reproductively isolated species. What were more confusing, and caused uncertainty, began to be formally designated as “races” or “subspecies” and given trinomial recognition sanctioned in zoological nomenclature, which earlier “varieties” were not.

I have quoted Ernst Mayr’s perhaps most elucidating analysis of species concept(s) above, and modern students may benefit significantly by consulting the extremely well written book by E.O. Wiley—“*Phylogenetics*” (1981), especially Chapter 2 on “Species and speciation,” where he explains the several species concepts that have been theorized. Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth (1996, *ORIENTAL CHECKLIST*, pp. 3-5) briefly “clarified” what the two most widely used species concepts today were: the BSC (Biological Species Concept) which employs both species and subspecies status to distinct living populations, and the PSC (Phylogenetic Species concept) under which “the use of subspecies is discouraged.” Wiley (1981: 24), and earlier authors, had termed the latter an “Evolutionary Species Concept” (ESC) and I have not followed how this key-word name change came about.

This “Letter” of mine is used as a publication outlet to introduce what I will theoretically put forth as the **GSC (Geographical Species Concept)** which I am convinced is a more accurate, testable, way to evaluate isolated or specialized populations and judge species limits. As Mayr (1942: 186) had written, this was “the only way by which new species can originate” and that it was “correct for birds.” Wiley (1981: 43) wrote:

“Historically, the notion of a correlation between geographic factors and speciation grew out of the observation that closest relatives tend to occupy separate but contiguous geographic regions (Wallace, 1855). Species in sympatry resembled each other less than species in allopatry. This was Wallace’s major pre-1859 contribution to evolutionary theory, a fact little cited by modern evolutionists.”

In my Letter # 35 (Pitta 109-110, May-June 2000) I had reviewed David Quammen’s fine Book “*The Song of the Dodo*” in which he wrote about this very landmark paper of Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913): “On the law which has regulated the introduction of new species” [*Annals and Magazine of Natural History* (16) 2: 184-196], which had caused Charles Darwin to hurry with his own (joint) announcement about “*The Origin of Species by natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*” (1858, published in 1859). This “Vicariance Speciation” can also affect larger populations given a geographic disjunction, and the botanist V. Grant characterized it in his book “*Plant Speciation*” (1971: 111) as follows:

“The theory in its modern form holds that geographic races are the precursors of species in a continuous process of evolutionary divergence The spatial isolation of populations at the racial stage of divergence enables the separate populations to develop and maintain the gene combinations determining their distinctive morphological and physiological characters. The beginnings of reproductive isolation set in at some stage. Species formation is then an extension of these processes.”

I have written about the theories of another botanist, Leon Croizat, synoptically, in my Letters # 42 & 44 (with my original map showing the biogeographical areas, sub-areas and sub-sub-areas of our sub-continent) and believe that adoption of his Panbiogeography theory, his view that “earth and life evolve together” and analyzing generalized tracks, together with critical, revised, phylogenetic hypotheses of evolutionary relationships, is the best way to proceed to real species recognition, which can only be based on this resuscitated “Geographical Species Concept.” The BSC, which prefers to devalue, downgrade, distinct allopatric populations, underrate what are thought to be “minor” distinguishing characters, and assign these an infraspecific rank of “subspecies” or “race” is, to me, a faulty decision, based on inadequate analysis and on an uncertainty caused owing to incomplete data, unsatisfactory research and lack of field familiarity with our native birds in life. However, even the PSC, which Inskipp *et al.* (1996) professed they followed, fails to recognize real species which this concept chooses to ignore, as “races.” Their *ORIENTAL CHECKLIST* I found very unsatisfactory, tentative, and exceedingly “conservative.”

For the past couple of years or more I have been engaged in a serious, preliminary, analysis of the species limits of our sub-continent’s birds (including those in Burma, Afghanistan and other neighbouring homogenous areas), using the recent illustrated and mapped works of Grimmett, the Inskipp couple, Kazmierczak, and their artists. These have been compared with all earlier major “general summaries” of Abdulali, Sālim Ali, Ripley, Biswas, Baker, Blanford, Oates, Hume, Blyth and Jerdon. In the process of this analytical exercise I have begun to realize that it is only a **GSC** which helps me sort difficult problems and questions relating to species—complexes and what Stuart Baker, Dillon Ripley, Humayun Abdulali and Biswamoy Biswas treated as polytypic “species,” each of these assumed to comprise of from two to half-a-dozen or more “subspecies.” Out of this labour of mine, new physical maps of the biogeography of this sub-continent (see my Letter # 44 in

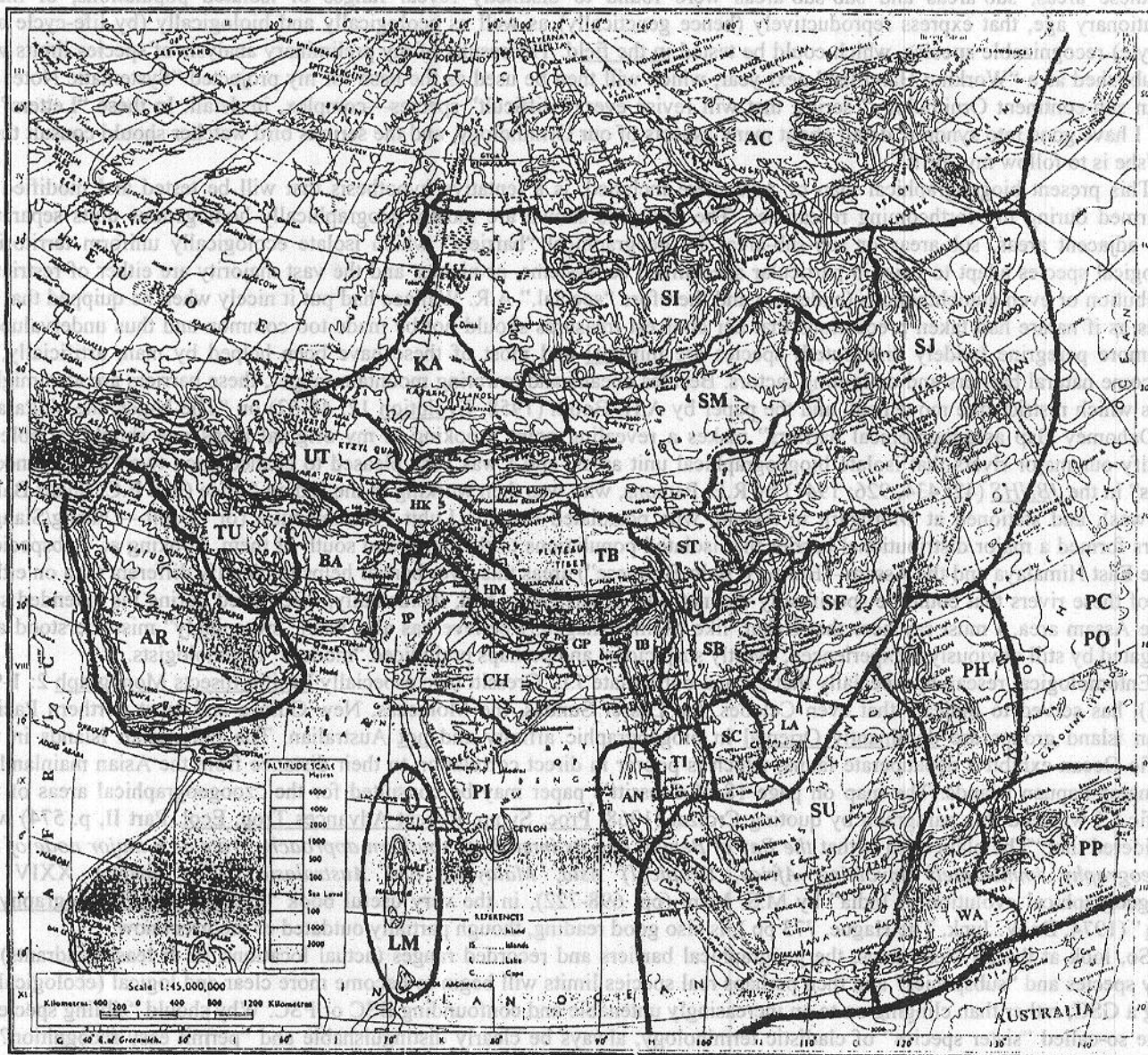
Pitta 122-123, June—July 2001), and of the Asian continent (see original map included in this Letter), were able to be drafted, and these areas, sub-areas and sub-sub-areas were found to distinctly reveal ranges of isolated populations, of much evolutionary age, that express reproductively (hence genetically) as well as ecologically and biologically (by life-cycle and lifestyle) recognizable **species**, which could be tested in the field. The results of my preliminary analysis of species limits will be published as a “Working Hand-list” next year, which will then be used as the base for my projected “Systematic Notes on Indian sub-continent Ornithology” series, that will revise every “difficult” species—complex, in detail. In these “Letters” of mine I have gone into synoptic detail about many aspects of our Ornithology, and the serious bird watcher should consult them if he/she is to follow my “drift.”

This present biogeographical map of Asia, here included, is a tentative hypothesis that will be tested and modified or confirmed during my forthcoming researches. The divisions shown are mostly geographically homogenous units separated from adjacent areas, sub-areas or sub-sub-areas by geographical “barriers” which isolate ecologically uniform territories. Biological species adapt to exist in particular specialized ecosystems, or niches, and the vast majority are either of restricted distribution or even autochthonous (endemic) and therefore “special.” A.R. Wallace had put it nicely when he quipped that “It seems as if nature had taken precautions that her choicest treasures should not be made too common and thus undervalued.” The more peregrine (widely distributed) species are minimal and most of these have been helped by man, artificially, to overcome natural barriers and delimiting factors. Besides oceans and towering mountain ranges, these barriers are also mighty rivers which restrict free movement, and the paper by A.H. Booth (1958, *Evolution* 12: 48-62) on “The Niger, the Volta and the Dahomey Gap as geographical barriers” makes a revealing point. Looking at my original maps one should be able to identify our major rivers that isolate biogeographical unit areas, and I was very pleased to chance upon two “Miscellaneous Notes” in the *JBNHS* (42: 434, 926; 1941) by R.E. Parsons, who was then working in the Indian Police (like E.C. Stuart Baker also was), and stationed at Dibrugarh in Assam, who postulated that the Lohit—Brahmaputra (or “Lohit—Dihang/Siang”) Rivers formed a major distributional barrier that isolated populations to the north and south of them. Looking at “subspecies” of the East Himalaya and the Assam—Burma (“Indo-Burmese”) areas this river barrier helps to identify different taxa on either side of these rivers that could be specifically distinct, like Stuart Baker had, incidentally, discovered during his extended stay in the Assam area. I must say here that Baker, like Meinertzhagen, I believe has also been “sweepingly” misunderstood and castigated by still obviously inexperienced, overtly suspicious, and perhaps prejudiced “modern” ornithologists.

Entomological research, especially that carried out by late J.L. Gressitt (see especially *Pacific Insects Monograph* 2: 1-94; 1961), has served to indicate that even Celebes, the Lesser Sundas, the Moluccas, New Guinea and most northern Pacific Ocean island groups are dominantly Oriental in biogeographic affinity and not Australian. The Polynesian Islands in the Pacific Ocean exhibit a depauperate fauna, which is poorer in direct correlation to their distance from the Asian mainland or the major Papuan islands. The map on page 18 of Gressitt’s paper may be consulted for the “zoogeographical areas of the Pacific.” I will end this paragraph by quoting Croizat (1968, *Proc. Symp. Recent Advances Trop. Ecol.* Part II, p. 574) who considered that “The plain truth is that *the Bay of Bengal and its immediate southern approaches rate as a major node of the biogeography immediately involving Africa, (tropical) Asia, Malaysia, and Australasia.*” The chapter XXIV on “Biogeographical evolution in India” by M.S. Mani (pp. 698-722), in the very useful book “*Ecology and Biogeography in India*” (1974, Dr W. Junk, The Hague, 773 pp.), is also good reading, though partially outdated or incorrect now.

So, look at the physical maps, the geographical barriers and recorded ranges (actual locations, or at least quadrants) of every species and “subspecies” and then perhaps real species limits will begin to become more clear and logical (ecologically) using a GSC, rather than clinging on to an increasingly untenable and confounding BSC or PSC. Why should “sibling species,” or the so-called “sister species” of cladistic terminology, always be clearly distinguishable and “permit easy recognition?” I would not be surprised if *Pericrocotus brevirostris* and *P. ethologus*, as understood now, are still species—complexes including more real species that have continued to “deceive” the taxonomist! Some “subspecies” have already been recognized for both these taxa which may include at least one other real species of each. The final blow to the validity of both the BSC and PSC is shown up by Mayr’s statement (*op. cit.*) that if *Garrulax moniliger* and *G. pectoralis* “were separated geographically they would at once be considered races of one species.” Only because they are sympatric in life they are being given species status! This is nothing but making a mockery of nature, using such theoretical “concepts” to influence decisions. My “equation,” as given in Letter # 55 (Pitta 138, October 2002): “**RIP + BAR = RS**” is what I believe will indicate real species clearly. If distinct populations are reproductively isolated through allopatry (no gene flow or contact), or by isolating mechanisms (behavioural, physiological, ecological, etc.) evolved in sympatry, they must be treated as real species. Hypothetical “fears” of such distinct populations perhaps “re-establishing contact” later and hybridizing (hybrids are only products of two real species!) are evolutionary “dead-ends” and the last refuge of taxonomic uncertainty, doubt or, simply, “convenience!” Therefore, I suggest we disregard this BSC or PSC (ESC) chimera and adopt the renewed GSC suggested here and see how doubts will disappear and real species will flutter before you in glee and relief that their actual status has finally been acknowledged or resuscitated. To understand life in the Indian sub-continent, one must be able to imbibe, through proper learning and experience, what I term its “*Hindustaniyat*,” its unique “pattern and process.” **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, c/o Azman Farm, Doddagubbi P.O., Bangalore 562 149 & flycatcher@eudoramail.com.**

BIOGEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, SUB-AREAS AND SUB-SUB-AREAS OF THE CONTINENT OF ASIA

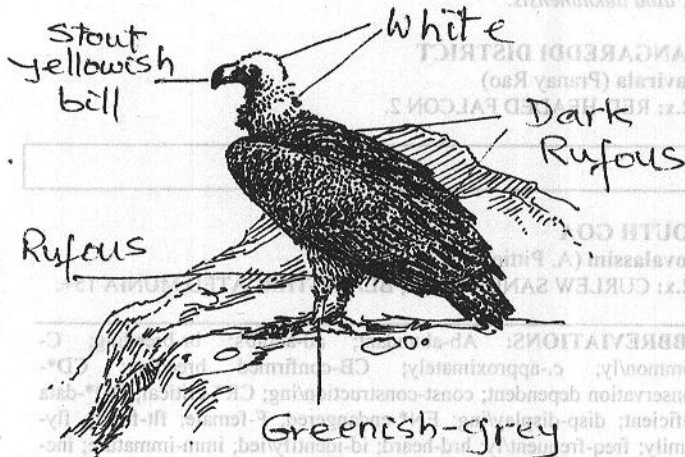
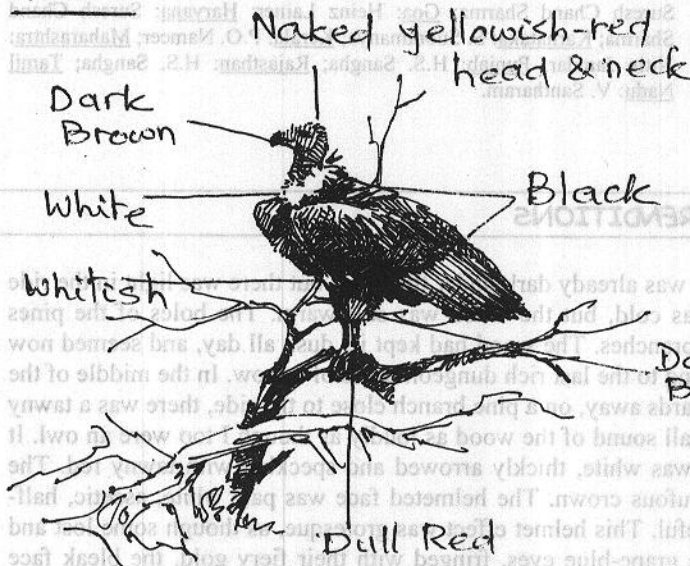


AC	=	ARCTIC	PI	=	PENINSULAR INDIAN
AN	=	ANDAMAN—NICOBAR	PO	=	POLYNESIAN
AR	=	ARABIAN	PP	=	PAPUAN
BA	=	BALUCH—AFGHAN	SB	=	SINO—BURMESE
CH	=	CENTRAL HIGHLANDS	SC	=	SIAMESE—CAMBODIAN
GP	=	GANGETIC PLAIN	SF	=	SINO—FORMOSAN
HK	=	HINDU KUSH—KARAKORAM	SI	=	SIBERIAN
HM	=	HIMALAYAN	SJ	=	SINO—JAPANESE
IB	=	INDO—BURMESE	SM	=	SINO—MONGOLIAN
IP	=	INDUS PLAIN	ST	=	SINO—TIBETAN
KA	=	KAZAKH	SU	=	SUNDALAND
LA	=	LAOS—ANNAM	TI	=	TENASSERIM ISTHMUS
LM	=	LACCADIVE—MALDIVE	TB	=	TIBETAN PLATEAU
PC	=	PACIFIC	TU	=	TURKO—PERSIAN
PH	=	PHILIPPINE	UT	=	UZBEK—TURKMAN
			WA	=	WALLACEAN

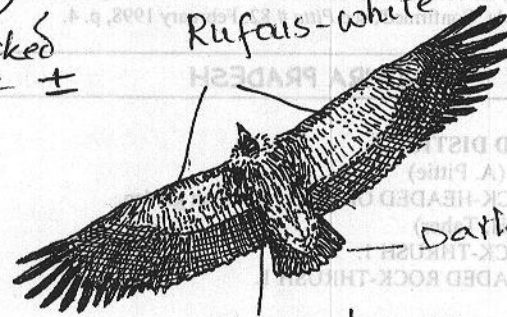
FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

EURASIAN GRIFFON

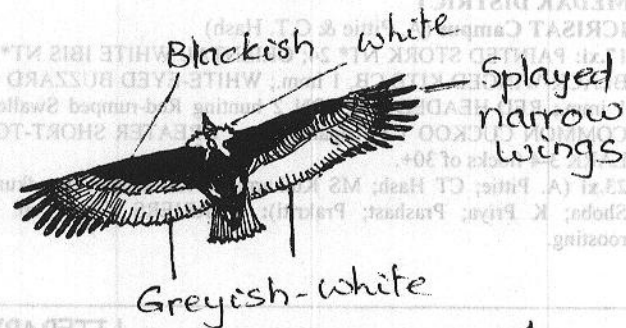
(Gyps fulvus)
100cms - Whitebacked
Vulture ±

ADULTADULT

Rufous-white
Dark Brown



Rufous-brown
with stripes

RED HEADED VULTURE

(Sarcogyps calvus)
185cms - Whitebacked Vulture ±

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For information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Ashesh Pittie (23350683) & Siraj A. Taher (26615608) Website: <http://www.birdwatchers.org> E-mail: asheshpittie@yahoo.com
Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs 250 for outstation cheques.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills (A. Pittie)

20-29.xi: BLACK-HEADED ORIOLE 1 in urban garden.

Jubilee Hills (H. Taher)

4.x: BLUE ROCK-THRUSH 1.

5.x: BLUE-HEADED ROCK-THRUSH 1.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Farahabad (Pranay Rao)

21.x: BLACK EAGLE 2, POB, 1 bird adding mat., to old N.; PAINTED SPURFOWL 1; GREEN IMPERIAL-PIGEON 2; GREY-HEADED FLYCATCHER 1.*

Kalwakurty (Pranay Rao)

22.x: INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE CR* 6; LONG-BILLED VULTURE CR* 4; BLACK EAGLE 2 being mobbed by 2 BONELLI'S EAGLE; PEREGRINE FALCON (SHAHEEN) 1.

Srisailam—Domalapenta (Pranay Rao)

22.x: PAINTED STORK NT* 6; BLACK EAGLE 2.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (A. Pittie & C.T. Hash)

17.xi: PAINTED STORK NT* 24; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS NT* 14; BLACK-WINGED KITE CB, 1 imm.; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD CB, 1 imm.; RED-HEADED FALCON 2 hunting Red-rumped Swallows; COMMON CUCKOO 1 F, hepatic phase; GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK 3-4 flocks of 30+.

23.xi (A. Pittie; CT Hash; MS Kulkarni; K Katikaneni; Nandkumar; Shoba; K Priya; Prashast; Prakriti): HARRIERS *Circus* sp. 438 roosting.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary (S Bhargavi & C Srinivasulu)

8-10.xi: GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK; WHITE WAGTAIL race *M. alba dukhunensis*.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Ravirala (Pranay Rao)

22.x: RED-HEADED FALCON 2.

GOA

SOUTH GOA

Covalassim (A. Pittie)

22.x: CURLEW SANDPIPER 2; BLACK-THROATED MUNIA 15+.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

“Half an hour before sunset I came to a pine wood. It was already dark under the trees, but there was light in the ride as I walked along it from the west. Outside it was cold, but the wood was still warm. The boles of the pines glowed redly under the blue-black gloom of their branches. The wood had kept its dusk all day, and seemed now to be breathing it out again. I went quietly down the ride, listening to the last rich dungeon notes of a crow. In the middle of the wood, I stopped. A chill spread over my face and neck. Three yards away, on a pine branch close to the ride, there was a tawny owl. I held my breath. The owl did not move. I heard every small sound of the wood as loudly as though I too were an owl. It looked at the light reflected in my eyes. It waited. Its breast was white, thickly arrowed and speckled with tawny red. The redness passed over the sides of its face and head to form a rufous crown. The helmeted face was pale white, ascetic, half-human, bitter and withdrawn. The eyes were dark, intense, baleful. This helmet effect was grotesque, as though some lost and shrunken knight had withered to an owl. As I looked at those grape-blue eyes, fringed with their fiery gold, the bleak face seemed to crumble back into the dusk; only the eyes lived on. The slow recognition of an enemy came visible to the owl, passing from the eyes, and spreading over the stony face like a shadow. But it had been startled out of its fear, and even now it did not fly at once. Neither of us could bear to look away. Its face was like a mask; macabre, ravaged, sorrowing, like the face of a drowned man. I moved. I could not help it. And the owl suddenly turned its head, shuffled along the branch as though cringing, and flew softly away into the wood.” [J.A. Baker (1967): *The Peregrine*.]

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Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (23350683) & Siraj A. Taher (56612608) Website: <http://www.bsaponline.org> E-mail: aasheesh@vsnl.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IP TTTA



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2003

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 141: January 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: seats may be available in volunteering members cars and will be reserved on a first-come first-served basis. Members willing to take passengers please contact Shafaat Ulla (23353098), Aasheesh (23350683), or Siraj (55612608).

Sunday, 26-1-2003: ICRISAT Asia Centre, Patancheru, Medak Dist. Members proceeding directly are requested to reach the destination by 7:30 a.m. and assemble at the main gate. Transportation within the campus will be arranged. Please carry snacks and water. This will be a half-day trip.

INDOOR MEETINGS: 20-1-2003, 6:00 pm: Slide show by K. Subramanyam, Vidyaranya High School, Opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

30-1-2003, 6:00 pm: talk by Dr Chris Bowden (of the RSPB): "Challenges of conserving the Northern Bald Ibis in Morocco", Vidyaranya High School, Opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED TO MAKE IT CONVENIENT TO ATTEND THIS MEETING, WHICH PROMISES TO BE IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING.

EDITORIAL - ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS - Siraj A. Taher

Migratory birds are an international component of biodiversity. Regularly crossing national and international borders, they do not belong to any country, but to several countries over their whole range. For effective implementation of any conservation measures, it is important and necessary that such steps are taken in all countries along their route, or else it is quite possible that the species may become endangered. Today, there are many migratory birds that are threatened. Several populations are decreasing while some are facing extinction. These trends will continue unless and until strong measures are implemented. Also, there is a need to understand clearly by the planners, scientists and ordinary people, the value of these species and the responsibility for their management and conservation.

In 1967, the International Wetland and Waterfowl Research Bureau, Slimbridge, U.K (IWRB) started a scheme to monitor wintering waterbirds, mainly Anatidae and Coots. In the

1980's, as new continents got involved, all waterbirds were added including those dependent on the wetlands. These waterfowl counts have been carried out regularly in the month of January, since the 1960's. In 1967, Iran joined the movement and Pakistan did so in the early 1970's. The first total Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Census (AWC) was done in January 1987, in which year India also joined. The success of the Asian Waterfowl Census has far exceeded the expectations of the organizers. As the exercise continued year after year, it became clear that AWC was not just an effective way of gathering important data of the waterfowl populations in Asia but, also an extremely popular exercise, which could have a great impact on public awareness to the problems being faced by wetlands and waterfowl in Asia. The AWC is co-ordinated by the Asian Wetland Bureau from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

During field work, counts are carried out by volunteers, birdwatching societies, natural

history institutions, and the state forest department personnel; including the staff at national parks and sanctuaries. Guidelines and instructions are sent to the participants every year, but the selection of the wetland for conducting the waterfowl count is entirely left to the convenience of the counters. It is preferred that the same sites are counted every year, for correlating the data gathered. The appointed regional and national co-ordinators ensure that all duplication of counts and errors are removed from the data received before it is forwarded to the nodal and international agencies.

Since 1987, the BSAP has been involved with this census exercise in Andhra Pradesh. With increase in participation and number of sites, the results have been both encouraging and informative. It is unlikely ever to achieve complete coverage of all sites and species throughout the region, but it should be possible, with the data available, to develop procedures through which population of most species can be effectively determined and monitored.

In some parts of Asia, populations of waterbirds are dispersed across a network of small wetlands (mostly tanks or ponds) within a region (eg. South India). Individual sites may or may not hold large populations of birds at any given time. But taken together, these wetlands support significantly large numbers. Conservation of these areas depends on maintaining the character of the network of these small but important wetlands.

In my opinion, by far the greatest achievement of the AWC lies in its network of dedicated individuals who volunteer their time and effort to count waterfowl at wetland sites throughout the Asian region.

Red Data Bird Revisited: Jerdon's Courser

Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* was first described from central India around 1848 by Dr. T.C. Jerdon, a British Army Medical Officer, and was seen a few times up to 1900. It was then lost, believed to be extinct, for 86 years, until its remarkable rediscovery in January 1986 in

Cuddapah District, Andhra Pradesh, by Bharat Bhushan from the BNHS, helped by Aitanna, a bird trapper from Reddipalli Village, during a study funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Indian Government. This area was to be dug up for an irrigation canal, but recognising the ornithological importance of this site, it was declared a Sanctuary by the Forest Department and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh. Subsequently, this species has been seen in a few restricted areas of the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary.

Jerdon's Courser is nocturnal and nothing is known of its numbers, distribution or habitat requirements, although it is believed to have a tiny, possibly declining population, and is therefore classified as Critically Endangered. To learn more about this species, researchers from the BNHS, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and the Universities of Reading and Cambridge, UK, joined forces in a research project supported by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative and the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department. The first priority was to discover the geographical range of the Jerdon's Courser by developing a standard survey technique - something difficult for a bird that has been seen only on a handful of occasions, and whose voice unknown!

Since 1986, the Jerdon's Courser has been seen occasionally, aided with a torchlight and a buzzer to mask the observers' footfalls. Success by this method varied enormously depending in the area being surveyed, and failure in not locating the courser didn't necessarily mean that they were absent. To overcome this, tracking strips were made by clearing and then leveling a strip of ground some 5 metres long and 25 cm wide using locally obtained fine soil made up to 2 cm thick and smoothened using a builders trowel. On some strips infra red camera traps were also set up to enable identification of birds crossing them. These strips were first laid where the coursers were known to exist to determine the efficiency of the method.

To identify which tracks belonged to Jerdon's Coursers the footprints were photographed and plaster casts were made. Most species were excluded from this area having similar sized feet since the Jerdon's Courser has a vestigial hind toe, therefore any foot print with a hind toe could not belong to this species. Museum specimens

were checked to verify the tracks and, measurements were taken using a vernier calipers. Two birds were also captured by the camera trap, thereby easily identifying the foot prints.

Subsequently, other likely areas were sampled and three other locations proved to have Jerdon's Coursers, the farthest some 14 KM from previously known locality. This research is only just the beginning and already the calls have been recorded! The calls however do not generate much interest among the birds for most part of the year. The droppings of the birds,

when analyzed determined that they fed mainly on termites. This may be a factor in determining the species distribution, as it might be limited in its range for want of a particular species of termites. Only time and future research will reveal more information about this mysterious inhabitant of central India's scrub Jungles.

World Birdwatch

Vol. 24 Number 4 Dec 2002

BirdLife International

Editor Richard Thomas

Article Contributed Panchapakesan Jeganathan

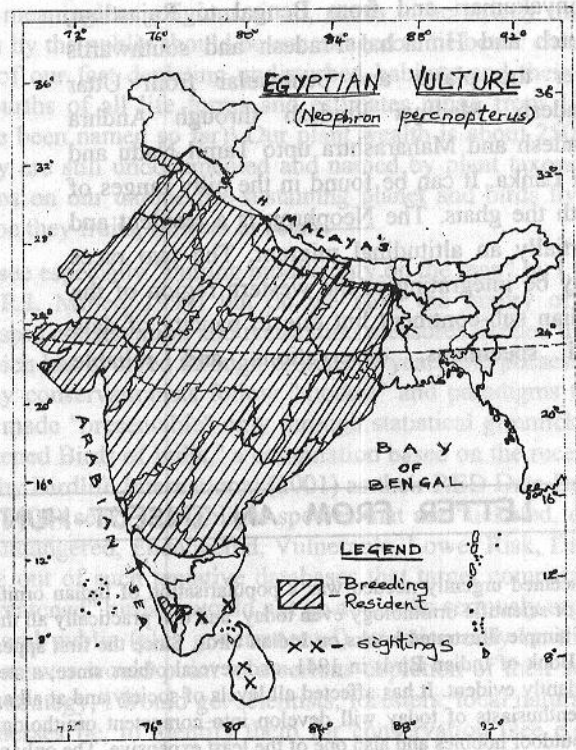
SPOTLIGHT - EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*Neophron percnopterus*) By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in BirdLife International's Red Data Book. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

It is not known whether Pharaoh liked it roasted or fried, but a common name of the bird – "Pharaoh's Chicken" suggests it must have been a favourite bird on his dining table. Better known as the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus p.*) which is the nominate race and the Indian race which used to be called the Scavenger Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus gingianus*). A small kite-like vulture, the adults have an overall dirty-white plumage, black flight feathers, a naked head and neck which are yellow, and a yellow beak. The neck is surrounded by a ruff of feathers. The nominate race is slightly larger and has a horny bill. Sexes alike in both the races. In flight, it looks like a small eagle but with long and pointed wings and a wedge-shaped tail. In both races, the immature birds are dark brown, mottled with white on back, breast and wings. There are several intermediate races.

The Egyptian Vulture is a very useful scavenger in the neighbourhood of human habitations in towns and villages and congregation places like pilgrim centres and village fairs. They also follow cattle and goat herds. Perched on mounds or on top of ruined buildings, they keep a look-out for food. When walking on the ground, it has a rather "funny-looking" gait. But, like other vultures, it has an easy, graceful flight, flying low and mostly gliding. Usually seen in twos and

threes, they gather together on sighting food. It associates with crows, kites and other vultures at carcasses and refuse dumps. The food is carrion, offal, garbage and human waste. Occasionally it eats frogs, grasshoppers, locusts and termites.



Breeding is between February and May, but mainly in March-April. The nest is a dirty and shabby platform of twigs, rags, scraps, hair and other such material. It is placed on a ledge, or a niche on cliffs or in dilapidated or disused buildings or forts or, occasionally in the fork of a large Banyan or Peepul tree. Sometimes, old nests may be renovated or disused eagle nests usurped. Two eggs are laid varying from white to brick red blotched with reddish-brown or black. Incubation period is 42 days. Both sexes share nest-building and parental duties.

Extraliminally the nominate race of the Egyptian Vulture has a very widely distributed range. It extends from Southern Europe, Southern Russia, Turkey, Arabia, Iran, Morocco and Egypt, Central and Southern Africa, Afghanistan, into Pakistan, Sind, Baluchistan and N.W. Frontier Province. From here it then encompasses parts of North-western India to Punjab, Western Himalayas and Kashmir. In most of the Indian Sub-continent, the race *Neophron percnopterus gingianus* is to be found from Nepal to Kanyakumari and from Bengal to Rajasthan, Kutch and Himachal Pradesh and southwards over the plains and peninsular from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh through Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra upto Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. It can be found in the hilly ranges of both the ghats. The *Neophron* is a resident and partially an altitudinal migrant. The two races may be integrating in the western region of the Indian sub-continent but due to paucity of data and specimens, observations and reliable

statistics the presence of the two races is difficult to determine.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Egyptian Vulture has been recorded from Vizagapatnam and Waltair and along the sea-coast, (Vishakapatnam District), Nelapattu, (Nellore District), Asifabad, (Adilabad District), Nagarkurnool and Farahabad, (Mahaboobnagar District), and in Hyderabad and its surrounds (Ranga Reddy District). Old records of Col. Sparrow (1914) and Salim Ali (1931) have recorded this vulture from Hyderabad City and environs, Nagarkurnool, Mananur, Borgampad and elsewhere. Sparrow found several nests containing eggs and young, usually one or two at Masaipet (Nizamabad District), Trimulgherry and Eswantraopet between 20 February and 5 April (1914).

In the last five or six years, the Vulture populations of all species in the Indian sub-continent and other countries have become critically low and the Egyptian Vulture is no exception to this. The vulture populations in the Indian sub-continent and also in several other areas in the old-world have declined considerably and in several areas, whole populations have been decimated. Nowadays there are very few sightings of any vulture groups. Small numbers may be seen occasionally. In villages and by the roadside, carcasses are lying rotting and uneaten. The reason for this very sharp reduction of vulture populations has not yet been determined. Till such time the death of the Egyptian Vultures as also the other species will remain a mystery.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST-58

"... What seemed urgently needed was a popularisation of Indian ornithology. That so little interest exists among our countrymen in birdwatching or scientific ornithology even today, and that practically all the work in the past was done by Europeans, has been largely due to the lack of simple illustrated books on Indian birds. Since the first appearance of Whistler's Popular Handbook of Indian Birds in 1928 and my own Book of Indian Birds in 1941, and several others since, a steady increase in general interest in birds and bird watching has become abundantly evident. It has affected all levels of society and at all ages, and it is to be hoped that with increasing facilities some of the youthful enthusiasts of today will develop into competent ornithologists in time. Bird watching is one of the most enjoyable and satisfying of outdoor hobbies and also one of the least expensive. The only comparatively costly item of equipment needed, but one which is essential for getting

the fullest value from one's opportunities, is a good pair of field glasses [binoculars -K.G.]. Pencil, paper and patience (in generous quantity) are the only other requisites for purposeful bird watching." [Sâlim Ali, 1971, "Ornithology in India. Its past, present and future." *Science & Culture*, 37: 362-363.]

"Ornithology as a hobby or profession or persuasion, whatever one may choose to call it, though full of adventures and rewards and disappointments, is by its very nature one of the most peaceable pursuits of the out-of-doors. It is certainly not lacking in excitement and thrills, though these may be of a different kind from what the normal enquirer expects. The excitement lies in ferreting clues and then following them up step by step to the discovery or confirmation of a fact or facts, of which one has obtained a suspicion or hunch."

"With the richness and variety of bird life in India, exciting discoveries of a similar kind are awaiting to be made by any birdwatcher who has the requisite enthusiasm and perseverance. Although as yet its devotees here are limited, it is refreshing to find that birdwatching as a hobby is growing rapidly in popularity, along with other civilized outdoor pursuits." "Birdwatching provided the excuse for removing myself to where every prospect pleases-up in the mountains or deep in the jungles-away from the noisy rough and tumble of the dubious civilization of this mechanical high-speed age. A form of escapism, maybe, but one that hardly needs justification." [Sâlim Ali, 1985, "The Fall of a Sparrow," pp. 221, 223, 227.]

"Papers on birds have in the past consisted largely of regional lists, but the recent happy trend of laying greater emphasis on physiography, habitat and ecology, and detailed field notes on individual species, has helped to impart more life to the pages of the *Journal* and added to their usefulness for students. The increasing use of Champion's 'Forest Types of India and Burma', constantly advocated by the editors [Sâlim Ali, S.B. Setna, H. Santapau-K.G.] for fixation and description of biotopes, has tended in some measure, to minimise diffuseness in the terminology employed by workers in different branches of animal and plant life. Champion's system was primarily devised for foresters, but experience shows that there is real scope for simplifying and perfecting it for the general use of field naturalists possessing but little technical knowledge. Since scientists have to depend so largely for their data upon objective field observations of the so-called amateurs, the importance of a standard designation of habitats will be readily appreciated." [EDITORIAL, 1952, *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, 50: 693.]

Zoos? Lion Safaris? Deer Parks? Elephant Rides? Boat Cruises? These are the pathetic man-made entertainment avenues-to tickle, taunt, or terrify (!) a generally wildlife wary and ignorant populace-that need a serious re-think by the intelligentsia and the government. The era of circuses and Victorian exotic animal curio exhibits is thankfully past, so is that of the snake charmers and dancing bears which is dying out here. Wildlife trade, especially involving cage birds or those that are "released" symbolically as a meaningless religious ritual, needs to be strictly monitored and gradually banned. The money spent on such activities by the public should be encouraged to be better channelised into conservation and restoration (as well as research!) of our fast depleting undisturbed habitats and their treasures of biodiversity. Insects account for more than three-fourths of all life forms and estimates range from 10-30 million unknown species on earth today (only a million have been named so far)! Our plant wealth is about 250,000 species known today but indications are that almost as many are still undocumented and named by plant taxonomists! Both plants and insects form the basic life-support systems on our unique life-sustaining planet and birds live mostly on insect food but also on a variety of vegetable matter, be they fruits, flowers or seeds.

Any research or documentation is potentially useful (see especially "Putting biodiversity on the map" by I.C.B.P., 1992 and "Mapping the diversity of nature" edited by R.I. Miller, 1994) but do we have the luxury of loitering in unproductive avenues that give wrong ideas for the rapid conservation and restoration measures needed urgently if we are to save an incredible diversity of life on earth which has evolved through billions of years and possesses unknown benefits to mankind? I do not really understand why conservationists follow "models" and paradigms that are self-defeating, "outdated," and based on poor databases, made "presentable" only through statistical gimmicks. The latest *Buceros* (Vol. 7, No. 1+2; 2002) issue on the "Threatened Birds of India," a compilation based on the recently released "high profile" work on the threatened Birds of Asia, by Birdlife International (2001) as their RED Data Book (see also Aamir Ali, Newsletter for Birdwatchers, 41: 35-37; 2001) seeks to highlight species that are "ticketed, docketed and filed" (to use Hugh Whistler's terms) as "Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Lower Risk, Data deficient" or "Not Evaluated." I believe little is going to come out of such tentative databases that target comparatively better known animal species. Though I care about these "threatened" birds, I would not go about the seriously urgent business of their conservation by focusing scientific and general public (plus governmental) attention only on them. I would rather ask, WHY are they threatened? Every single answer would point to a serious depletion of their select, special habitats and niches. As a rapid, last resort functional strategy, I would get scientists, foresters, local naturalists (if any) and villagers, who know where undisturbed wildernesses lie, to identify them for conservation [see e.g., Gadgil & Meher-Homji, 1986, *Proc. Indian Acad. Sci. (Anim. Sci./Pl. Sci.) Suppl.*, pp. 165-180].

In India more than 90% of land has already been modified by its citizens and these stretches are of little or no value for supporting wildlife that are threatened, or forcibly adapted to agro- or urbo-ecosystems. As the late M. Krishnan had pleaded (Hornbill, April-June 1989, p. 14), why can we not set aside at least 10% of our land as protected/restored areas made out of bounds for general humanity, so that all wildlife, plant or animal, rare or plentiful, can survive in these "ecological islands"? If we protect such undisturbed ecosystems we save all the birds (threatened or not, as of now) and also other animals, especially insects as well as the indigenous plant species on which animal life (human too!) is sustained as our rich natural heritage. As I intend to prove now, our species concepts, even in "well known" birds are erroneous, and we are oblivious of a far greater diversity than currently recognized.

Botanists are generally much more aware of their special taxa and seem more organized than zoologists are, even bird watchers. Documentation of our Flora is way ahead of any animal group, even mosquitoes or butterflies and perhaps birds too. But who cares about threatened plant species? Do you? I wonder. Do I? Yes, most certainly. My scientific training and years of focussed work in the field all over this biodiverse country has made me realize that animals exist only because of the oxygen gas that plants make available to them. They also provide the food source, either directly or through herbivorous animals that feed on vegetable matter and are in turn food for carnivorous animals. No. This symbolic, ritualistic, conservation strategy (and the "non-violent" attitude to biodiversity research) has to end. Let us quickly identify remaining undisturbed or minimally modified ecosystems-grasslands to evergreen jungles, mountain streams to lagoons, arid deserts to sholals and a myriad other "forest types"-and resolve, through responsible, far-sighted, people and government executives to PROTECT them as national and global treasures, more valuable than any Taj Mahal or Koh-i-Noor diamond, and critical for our own survival. Unless threatened ecosystems are made the focus of conservation/restoration effort, and urgent action taken to give them "black cat" protection, like a presidential palace or Fort Knox, all this hoo-haah about "Threatened Birds" will be of no avail.

I have just returned from the highlands near Munnar, Kerala's "tea country" (a real live Circus was entertaining crowds there!) and am still recovering from the shock of devastation of the superb jungles I had worked in, and also from the sight of once very wary Nilgiri Tahr (Hemitragus hylocrius) behaving like domestic goat in front of tourists clicking away with their cameras! Tata Tea and associated Planters, besides the Kerala Forest Department, have ruined massive naturo-ecosystems and supplanted them with tea or eucalyptus which scientists equate with an ecological desert! Indian native jungles, that were partly retained by the British planters of colonial times as a norm, providing their tea gardens a natural balance, have now been replaced with Australian Eucalyptus species as "forest" which is again an ecological disaster. Which "God's own country"? And why? Kerala had the richest natural ecosystems in southern India when I was a post-graduate student researching their forests for my doctoral thesis in the 1970s. I am horrified that Kerala now has mostly, or only, rice, coconut, tea, rubber, cocoa, pepper, cardamom or coffee, and will embark on cinchona as well! The foresters there are paranoid about "protection," which is good, but bona fide researchers (even of the Zoological Survey of India and State Universities!) are suffering from lack of access to field areas for scientific sampling and documentation-a right curiously denied them, unfortunately and inexplicably.

Sâlim Ali focused on and popularized bird watching and promoted conservation measures (not much more), like Zafar Futehally is still doing. They are certainly to be thanked for slightly increased numbers of bird watchers active today, but the real problem is that besides twitching and listing and e-mailing, most of these persons have no training to do good science, nor do they bother about ecology or biogeography or evolution, or publish their field results. This has to stop if we scientists are to trust using databases of amateurs. Sâlim Ali knew this and so did Hugh Whistler before him. Humayun Abdulali was extremely forlorn and pessimistic of the future of scientific Ornithology in India and I believe he was right. "Nature education" (which is really the responsibility of the innumerable Biology teachers in our schools and colleges!) is "stealing" from critically needed funding for research priorities.

From this year I have an organized "Plan of Action" that will require concerned support from naturalists (including birders) if it is to be followed up to fruition some two decades from now. Me and a few of my "amateur-friendly" scientist colleagues will help train field-active amateurs to pick up skills and help us document databases on our little-known (and analysed) biodiversity. Only a certified trainee (or an acknowledged expert) will be recognized as one of the 250-500 or more "Mixed Hunting Party (MHP)" volunteers [or one of a "Panel of Exploring Conductors (PECs)"] who will be given the responsibility to monitor at least one, if not more 1° Quadrants (and biogeographical sub-sub-areas) around his/her home station (or other frequently visited ones) for the next 5, if not 15-20 years, for bird databases, if not those on insects and plants as well.

The INDIAN HANDBOOK (1968-1974; reprinted 2001) was mooted in 1946 by Sâlim Ali and Ripley while on their

Mishmi Hills field survey in Arunachal Pradesh. Ripley brought out the OLD SYNOPSIS in 1961, after aborting a 7-part "Notes on Indian Birds" series (1948-1958), and work on the HANDBOOK commenced in 1964. After the 10 volumes of the HANDBOOK were published 22-28 years after genesis of the idea, and 7 years after the OLD SYNOPSIS, Ripley completed an updated NEW SYNOPSIS in 1982, 8 years after the HANDBOOK's last volume was published. A similar series, little known to Indians but of great relevance to us, was "The Birds of the Malay peninsula" initiated by H.C. Robinson who published the first 18-page "Hand-list" in 1907, and followed it up later by a better one in 1910. The first 2 volumes were published in 1927 and 1928 (17-20 years later) and then came the detailed 400+ page "Handlist" by F.N. Chasen in 1925. Robinson and Chasen published the 3rd volume in 1936 and Chasen the 4th in 1939. The final 5th volume, which is a summarized compendium-"Conclusion, and survey of every species," with a chapter on "The Eastern Palaearctic Migration System in Operation" by I.C.T. Nisbet, and 25 colour plates by the famous artist H. Grönvold, was written by Lord Medway and D.R. Wells and came out only in 1976, thus completing the series which Indian sub-continent birders should also refer to. Like they should Charles Vaurie's brace of volumes on Palaearctic Birds (1959, 1965) which he completed after his 37-part "Systematic Notes" on that fauna (1952-1959). He also wrote another relevant book for us on the Birds of Tibet, in 1972. Robinson and C.B. Kloss also authored "The Birds of south-west and peninsular Siam" (= Thailand; 1921, 397 pp.) and H.G. Deignan's masterpiece "The Birds of northern Thailand" (1945; 616 pp., reviewed by Abdulali in JBNHS 46: 709-711; 1947) and his "Checklist of the Birds of Thailand" (1963, 263 pp.) was followed up by a guide book on that country's birds by Boonsong Lekagul and P.D. Round in 1991. One other reference, of critical importance to us, is B.E. Smythies' "The Birds of Burma" (1986) which has recently been published as a new edition. An earlier work by E.W. Oates on "A Handbook of the Birds of British Burmah" (1883) is also useful. Kazmierczak (2000: 318-320) and Inskipp et al. (1996: 10-13) list some of these and other useful works for Indian sub-continent bird watchers. What I need now are keen, motivated and disciplined bird watchers of merit and field experience to volunteer as the 250-500 required documentors I will find useful for the projected 3rd edition of the FAUNA OF INDIA, BIRDS which should start appearing from 2017, if all goes well. It is up to them to realize the gravity of now ongoing "ecosystem decay," as David Quammen highlighted Thomas Lovejoy's "doomsday term" (see my Letter # 35; 2000), and join in this "Indian sub-continent Biodiversity Survey" (ISBS), if they care.

Kumar Ghorpadé, c/o Azman Farm, Doddagubbi P.O., Bangalore 562 149 & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

NEWS AND NOTES

1) Keechan, the tiny hamlet in the desert region of Rajasthan is now playing host to 15,000 demoiselle cranes. The cranes are totally under the protection of the villagers of the tiny hamlet who feed and take care of the feathered friends flying in from abroad. They stay for nearly six months in India before they fly back. As on 23rd November 2002 the figure is fifteen thousand and is expected to go up until the end of December. Thereafter there will be a decline in the numbers as the Cranes disburse further afield. Will bring you more updates as and when possible.

N.SHIVA KUMAR

2) Three male Green Munias (*Amandava formosa*) were brought to the Chowk Bird Market in Hyderabad. They were purchased by a BSAP member and kept in an enclosure prior to sending them to Adilabad for release, which is one of the areas in A.P. from which the birds are known. The birds are showing signs of nest building even in the absence of a female. A Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), was also procured from the same source and released, after taking the measurements, at Ravirala in Ranga Reddy District. While in flight, it was joined by another Greater Spotted Eagle, and both birds then flew away together.

3) The Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Census is being conducted as in previous years, in January 2003. All participating members must have received the forms from the BNHS. It is requested that they quickly get down to counting at the sites they have done in the earlier years or, others if they find it convenient. In case other members are interested to make a start this year, they may contact Siraj A. Taher, Regional co-ordinator, A.W.C. on 5561 2608 immediately.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviours like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English Names sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan and Pittie (2002): Standardised English and Scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i – viii, 1 – 36. Unless specified all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations and Regional Referees are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hussain Sagar (Ranjan Matthew)

30.xi.2002: BLACK-WINGED STILT 200+ on backwaters.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Farahabad (Raajeev Mathew)

1.xii.2002: BLACK EAGLE 4; CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE stooping to kill a GREEN IMPERIAL-PIGEON; GREY JUNGLEFOWL; INDIAN PEA FOWL CB, ad., with 4 yng.; ALPINE SWIFT; GREATER GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER; YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL VU*; ULTRAMARINE FLYCATCHER.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Miyapur Tank (M. Kalyani)

6.xii.2002: ASHY-CROWNED SPARROW-LARK CB, N with 1 yng.; PIED BUSHCHAT 1 M being swallowed by a Green Vine Snake *Ahaetulla nasutus* (Lacepede), in *Ipomoea* sp., on tank margins.

Ravirala (Hyder Jaffer & Pranay Rao)

16.xii.2002: PAINTED STORK 52; SPOONBILL 10; MALLARD 5.

KARNATAKA

CHIKMAGALUR DISTRICT

Bhadra Tiger Reserve (Kiran Katikaneni, Krishna Priya & Karuna Shah)

27-28.xii.2002: BLUE-WINGED PARAKEET; WHITE-BELLIED WOODPECKER; WHITE-BELLIED BLUE-FLYCATCHER; SOUTHERN HILL MYNA; WHITE-BELLIED TREEPIE.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab – Abundant; ad – adult/s; br – breeding; C – common/ly; c. – approximately; CB – confirmed breeding; CD* – conservation dependant; const – construction/ing; CR* – critical; DD* – data deficient; disp – displaying; EN* – endangered; F – female; flt – flight; fly – family; freq – frequent/ly; hrd – heard; id – identify/ied; imm – immature; inc – include/ing; Is – island; juv – juvenile; LM – local migrant; M – male; mat – material; N – nest/ing/s; NT* – near threatened; OH – overhead; POB – possible breeding; PRB – probable breeding; plm – plumage; RF – Reserve Forest; Resp – respectively; Tlk – Taluq; vil – village; VU* – vulnerable; WL – wildlife; yng – young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

Books received

The BSAP reading room received the following books during December 2002.

Book:

1. Anonymous (1933): The Bombay Natural History Society. 1883-1933. Printed in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Society, 1933. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay. [Presented by Mr. J.C. Daniel.].
2. Environment Protection Training and Research Institute (2002): Proceedings of the National Seminar on Conservation of Eastern Ghats. March 24-26, 2002. Envis Centre, EPTRI, Hyderabad. [Presented by EPTRI.].
3. Krishnan, M. & Government of Tamil Nadu (1986): Vedanthangal Water-bird Sanctuary. 2nd (Revised & enlarged) ed. Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras. [Presented by Vijayendra.].

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership: (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs. 25/- for outstation cheques.

IPTTA



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 142-143: February-March 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 16-iii-2003: Manjira Barrage, Medak District: Route: Kukatpally – BHEL – Sangareddy town; Manjira is 3km from the town. Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am. Some cars will leave from Panjagutta Cross Roads at 6.15am. This will be a full-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 17-iii-2003, 6pm: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings of the Society - Talk by Chris Bowden on Northern Bald Ibis in Morocco

Chris Bowden, a scientist with the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB) was visiting Hyderabad. The BSAP took this opportunity and arranged a talk by him at a special meeting on 30.i.2003. The topic of his illustrated talk was "Challenges of Conserving the Northern Bald Ibis in Morocco". The other visiting scientists who were also present at this meeting were Dr. Rhys Green also of the RSPB, Dr. Ken Norris of the University of Reading, Dr. Asad Rahmani and Dr. Bharat Bhushan, both from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), and P. Jeganathan, a research scholar at the BNHS, working on the Jerdon's Courser in Cuddapah District.

Chris Bowden spoke of his experiences in the study and conservation of the Northern Bald Ibis in Morocco, N.W. Africa. It was an illustrated talk and the slides showed the habitat and nesting sites very clearly. Most of the nests were crowded together on the side of cliffs and embankments. An interesting observation was the attraction of the birds to red coloured plastic bags, which were frequently stolen from an adjacent nest and pushed into their own. According to Chris, there are only about 300 Northern Bald Ibis left in Morocco. At any one time, flocks of about 200 birds could be seen, and this is what gives a false impression about the survival of this bird in the wild. Another problem noted during his field studies, was the regular death of chicks owing to non-availability of water. To overcome this problem, freshwater pits were provided at different places near the nesting sites and this helped in preventing chick mortality to a great extent.

After the talk, Dr. Bharat Bhushan, an ornithologist who was with the BNHS then, who had rediscovered the Jerdon's

Courser in Cuddapah District of A.P. in 1986, was presented a memento by the BSAP in appreciation of his contribution to Indian ornithology. It was a very well attended meeting and the members present benefited greatly from Chris Bowden's talk, as well as from interaction with the visiting ornithologists.

Workshop on Jerdon's Courser

A workshop was organized by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), BSAP and World Wide Fund for Nature, A.P. State Chapter (WWF), at Hotel Grand Kakatiya on 31.i.03. It was to review the work done so far under the collaborative project to study the Jerdon's Courser (*Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*), which was started in Cuddapah District A.P., in August 2000 and will continue till July 2003. The partners of this project are the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB), U.K., the Universities of Reading and Cambridge, U.K., BNHS India and is sponsored by the Darwin Initiative, U.K.

This workshop was to review the work done, and also to make future plans. Some of the important studies that are being conducted under this project are to determine the number of these birds that may be present in the area, its feeding ecology, habitat requirements, behaviour and movements. Jerdon's Courser is a nocturnal bird and one of the rarest in the world, and very little is known about this species. Since permission to trap the Jerdon's Courser and put a chip to facilitate field studies is not readily forthcoming, alternative methods have to be evolved to conduct studies. Conservation of the environment seems so very important for the survival of this very localised specie, so far not found anywhere else in the world. It had been first

recorded by T.C. Jerdon in Cuddapah in 1848 and later reported by Howard Campbell in 1900, from Bhadrachalam area near the Godavari River. It was rediscovered by Dr. Bharat Bhushan and since then, has caught the attention of the Indian and international scientific community.

According to P. Jeganathan, a field researcher from BNHS, who is involved in the Jerdon's Courser field studies in Cuddapah district, one of the most important work is to try and find the geographical range of this bird and secondly to track its localised movements. At the workshop, Jegan explained the methodology used and the interim results of his field studies to the invited audience. Next to give his presentation was Dr. Rhys Green of the RSPB, who is supervising the combined project work at Cuddapah, and Dr. Ken Norris, University of Reading, U.K. who spoke on some of the techniques used for the ecological and behavioural studies of the Jerdon's Courser. Sri B.C. Choudhary of the Wildlife Institute of India, gave a very interesting illustrated talk on the migration studies of the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles, using the radio microchips. Even though it was not directly related to the Courser studies, it highlighted the necessity of using modern scientific techniques for all future studies of reptiles, birds or animals. Extensive question and answer sessions followed. Vigorous discussions took place and very useful suggestions were made and even some proposals were put forward. Even though no firm commitments were made, it was felt by all that it was a very useful workshop and it is possible that after the end of the first phase of the project, future work will continue, so as to save this very highly endangered bird. A very sumptuous lunch had been arranged, during the course of which, informal discussions continued.

Led by Sri Hitesh Malhotra, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden, the A.P. Forest Department team comprised of Sarvasri A.V. Joseph, IFS; A. Shankaran; Q.M. Khan; B. Varaprasad; B. Srinivas; N.A. Shaikh and the Conservator from Kurnool. The RSPB team was represented by Dr. Rhys Green, Dr. Ken Norris and Chris Bowden. Dr. Asad Rahmani represented the BNHS. Smt. Gayatri Ramachandran, EPTRI; Sri. S.K. Niraj, IFS/MoEF-GOI; Sri. Pushp Kumar, IFS (Retd.) and Dr. Vasudev Rao also attended. WWF-India, A.P. Chapter was represented by Sarvasri Anil Epur, Gusti Noria and M.H. Rao. The BSAP members at the workshop were Siraj A. Taher, Aasheesh Pittie, Raajeev Mathews, M. Shafaat Ulla, Humayun Taher, Sushil Kapadia and Ritu Naidu. Mr. B.C. Choudhary and Dr. Bharat Bhushan attended as special invitees.

BSAP Trip to ICRISAT - 26.i.2003

It was early in the morning 6.10 am, cool and dark. Kiran, Karuna, Vinay and myself started our journey to ICRISAT. We stopped on the way, where students from Pranava School joined us. One of Kiran's cousins Praveen could also make it.

We reached ICRISAT at about 8.10 am where we met a

group of Birdwatchers. We boarded a bus and came to a small pond where we saw a few grey herons, Spotbills, Coots, Pochards, Indian Darter or Snakebird, Comb Ducks, Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Cormorants, Shovelers, Ashy Prinias and a Hornbill. We saw about 12 species of birds at our first stop. It was exciting. We stopped for about 45 minutes and then started off.

After about 5 minutes we stopped at another pond, to see teals, moorhens, Partridges, Black Drongos, River Tern, Pintail Ducks, Little Grebe, Little Brown Dove, Pied Kingfisher, Greater Spotted Eagles, and as we were trying to train the telescope on a Marsh Harrier we spotted a pair of Brahminy Ducks, in their orange brilliance. We saw lapwings also.

At the next stop we saw Sandpipers, Rufous Backed Shrike, Indian Roller, Barheaded Geese, a juvenile Painted Stork, and a White Ibis also called Oriental or Black-headed Ibis. We moved on to see an astounding number of Openbill storks; the count came up to 66. I later learnt that a single bird of this species finds a very warm area and the others follow it. As hot air rises upwards, it is a means for them to rise up.

We saw some Purple-rumped Sunbirds, a beautiful Blackwinged Kite, Redshanks, and a Ruff. Kiran also saw a jungle cat with a rodent in its mouth.

These field trips are really exciting and educative. In this trip we saw 38 species of birds out of which 21 species were new to me.

Books & Journals received

The BSAP reading room received the following journals / periodicals during December 2002.

Journals / Periodicals

1. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* #36, December 2002. [Exchange.]
2. *Suara Enggang. The Bimonthly Bulletin of the Malaysian Nature Society.* No. 6, 2002 November-December. [Exchange.]
3. *Vana Premi.* Vol. 4 No. 1, January 2003.
4. *Samsad News. The Prakriti Samsad Monthly Newsletter.* Vol. 20 No. 12, December 2002. [Exchange.]
5. *Down to Earth.* Vol. 11 No. 14, December 15, 2002; Vol. 11 No. 16, January 15, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.]
6. *Protected Area Update.* No. 36 & 37, June 2002. [Ibid.]
7. *Danphe. BirdConservation Nepal.* Vol. 11 Bulletin No. 3, September 2002. [Exchange.]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 59

"Landscape is never described. I may be proved wrong, but in all the great length of *My Experiments with Truth* I believe there are only three gratuitous references to landscape. In 1893, on the way out to South Africa, Gandhi notices the vegetation of Zanzibar; three years later, returning briefly to India, he lands at Calcutta, 'admiring the beauty' of the Hooghly River. His only important experience of landscape comes at the age of forty-five when, back in India for good, he goes to Hardwar, a place of Hindu pilgrimage in the Himalayas. 'I was charmed with the natural beauty about Hrishikesh and Lakshman Jhula, and bowed my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in Nature, and their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of Nature with a religious significance.'

The outer world matters only in so far as it affects the inner. It is the Indian way of experiencing; what is true of Gandhi's autobiography is true of many other Indian autobiographies, though the self-absorption is usually more sterile.

"Meditation and stillness can be a form of therapy. But it may be that the true Hindu bliss—the losing of the self—is more easily accessible to Hindus. According to Dr Sudhir Kakar, a psychotherapist at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, who is himself Indian and has practised both in Europe and in India, the Indian ego is 'underdeveloped', 'the world of magic and animistic ways of thinking lie close to the surface', and the Indian grasp of reality is 'relatively tenuous'.

This underdeveloped ego, according to Kakar, is created by the detailed social organization of Indian life, and fits into that life. . . Caste and clan are more than brotherhoods; they define the individual completely. The individual is never on his own; he is always fundamentally a member of his group, with a complex apparatus of rules, rituals, taboos. Every detail of behaviour is regulated. . . And religion and religious practices—'magic and animistic ways of thinking'—lock everything into place. The need, then, for individual observation and judgement is reduced; something close to a purely instinctive life becomes possible."

"We Indians," Kakar says, 'use the outside reality to preserve the continuity of the self amidst an ever changing flux of outer events and things.' Men do not, therefore, actively explore the world; rather, they are defined by it. It is this negative way of perceiving that goes with 'meditation', the striving after the infinite, the bliss of losing the self; it also goes with *karma* and the complex organization of Indian life. Everything locks together; one cannot be isolated from the other. In the Indian set-up, as Kakar says, it is the Western-style 'mature personality', individualistic and assertive, that would be the misfit. . .

In an active, busy country, full of passion and controversy, it is not an easy thing to grasp, this negative way of perceiving. Yet it is fundamental to an understanding of India's intellectual second-rateness [emphasis mine—K.G.], which is generally taken for granted but may be the most startling and depressing fact about the world's second most populous country, which now has little to offer the world except its Gandhian concept of holy poverty and the recurring crooked comedy of its holy men, and which, while asserting the antiquity of its civilization (and usually simply asserting, without knowledge or scholarship), is now dependent in every practical way on other, imperfectly understood civilizations [emphasis mine—K.G.]."

"Indians have made some contribution to science in this century; but—with a few notable exceptions—their work has been done abroad. And this is more than a matter of equipment and facilities. It is a cause of concern to the Indian scientific community—which feels itself vulnerable in India—that many of those men who are so daring and original abroad should, when they are lured back to India, collapse into ordinariness and yet remain content, become people who seem 'unaware of their former worth, and seem to have been brilliant by accident. They have been claimed by the lesser civilization, the lesser idea of *dharma* and self-fulfilment. In a civilization reduced to its forms, they no longer have to strive intellectually to gain spiritual merit in their own eyes; that same merit is now to be had by religious right behaviour, correctness."

India grieved for the scientist Har Gobind Khorana, who, as an American citizen, won a Nobel prize in medicine for the United States a few years ago. India invited him back and fêted him; but what was most important about him was ignored. 'We would do everything for Khorana,' one of India's best journalists said, 'except do him the honour of discussing his work.' The work, the labour, the assessment of that labour: it was expected that somehow that would occur elsewhere, outside India.

It is part of the intellectual parasitism that Indians accept (and, as a conquered people, have long accepted) while continuing to see their civilization as whole and possessed of the only truth that matters: offering refuge to 'the afflicted', as Gandhi saw it in 1914, and 'deliverance from this earthly life'. It is as though it is in the very distress and wordly incapacity of India—rather than in its once vigorous civilization—that its special virtue has now to be found. . .

The scientist returning to India sheds the individuality he acquired during his time abroad; he regains the security of his caste identity, and the world is once more simplified. There are minute rules, as comforting as bandages; individual perception and judgement, which once called forth his creativity, are relinquished as burdens, and the man is once more a unit in his herd, his science reduced to a skill. The blight of caste is not only untouchability and the consequent deification in India of filth; the blight, in an India that tries to grow, is also the over-all obedience it imposes, its ready-made satisfactions, the diminishing of adventurousness, the pushing away from men of individuality and the possibility of excellence.

Men might rebel; but in the end they usually make their peace. There is no room in India for outsiders. . .

"Obedience: it is all that India requires of men, and it is what men willingly give. The family has its rules; the caste has its rules. For the disciple, the guru—whether holy man or music teacher—stands in the place of God, and has to be implicitly obeyed, even if—like Bhawe with Gandhi—he doesn't always understand why. Sacred texts have to be learned by heart; school texts have to be learned by heart, and university textbooks, and the notes of lecturers. . . So India absorbs the new into its old self, using new tools in old ways, purging itself of unnecessary mind, maintaining its equilibrium. The poverty of the land is reflected in the poverty of the mind; it would be calamitous if it were otherwise."

"In conquered India renaissance has always been taken to mean a recovery of what has been suppressed or dishonoured, an exalting of old ways; in periods of respite men have never taken the opportunity, or perhaps have been without the intellectual means, to move ahead; and disaster has come again. Art historians tell us that the European renaissance became established when men understood that the past was not living on; that Ovid or Virgil could not be thought of as a kind of ancient cleric; that men had to put distance between the past and themselves, the better to understand and profit from that past. India has always sought renewal in the other way, in continuity. In the earliest texts men look back to the past and speak of the present Black Age; just as they look back now to the days of Gandhi and the fight against the British, and see all that has followed as defilement rather than as the working out of history. While India tries to go back to a idea of its past, it will not possess that past or be enriched by it. The past can now be possessed only by inquiry and scholarship, by intellectual rather than spiritual discipline. The past has to be seen to be dead; or the past will kill."

[V.S. Naipaul, 1977, PART THREE: Not Ideas, but Obsessions. Chapter 5—"A Defect of Vision" pp. 101-104, and Chapter 8—"Renaissance or Continuity" pp. 169-174, in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, 174 pp.]

Since March 2000 up to January 2003 (Pitta 107 to 141) I have written from A—Z on Indian Ornithology in my Letters # 33—58 (note the initial capital letter of each text portion) and introduced my reasoning on the mistaken species limits of our avifauna and the need to research our 1° quadrants, in detail, to become cognizant of the real status and diversity of our bird life today. "Ecosystem decay" threatens and research tends to get immersed in "citation inbreeding" and catch words, which amount to really very little and lead us astray. In my quote of late S.J. Gould (Pitta 137: 2) this master of revolutionary evolutionary thought had quipped—"Science is a quintessentially human activity, not a mechanized, robotlike accumulation of objective information, leading by laws of logic to inescapable interpretation. . . There is no science without philosophy and no philosophy without science. I quote the latest "Indian" Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul (after Khurana and Sen were selected and honoured in the recent past) above, to make a point—I believe "Sir Vidya's" analysis of us Indians, the Indian lifestyle and ethos merits close scrutiny and attention, if not serious contemplation as well, by bird watchers or scientists or whoever.

The Indian Science Congress, an annual "mela" of little consequence, held in Bangalore last month, tried to introspect into the lack of interest among young students in a scientific career. But, for a country that is hardly scientifically tuned mentally and which has no real achievements in Science throughout its tumultuous history of conquest after conquest, resulting in an "underdeveloped ego" in its natives, this is no surprise. We are past masters at "aping the west" without understanding their mindset but scavenging on scientific discoveries made abroad. Technology, bio- or whatever, has usurped science here, like "nature education" and "conservation" has overwhelmed research. When we hardly know the life-cycles of even our less common animals and plants, how do we go about the irrational activism of protecting them? Chemical pesticides are being used wholesale to try to counter resurgence and immunity in enemies of our crops and livestock. Where is their biology or ecology being researched, in order to understand the cause and effect of these pest control problems?

Birds as an integral component of our agro-ecosystems have been ignored. Sālim Ali's initiative to put life into Economic Ornithology has yielded little. Ornithologists are targeting single species which is also needed but we are regrettably "missing the forest for the trees." These "RED DATA" (Restricted, Endemic and Disjunct birds would be better research objects!) books are not the way to proceed towards protection of not just our "threatened" birds but our uniquely diverse and singularly peculiar biodiversity. What are being termed "IBA's" (Important Bird Areas) is the way forward though why IBAs are vital only for birds is beyond me! What we desperately need the sprinkling of field-active, querulous, bird watchers here to do is to adopt particular habitats (both undisturbed and modified, in and around each other) in single 1° quadrants, and study them intimately for knowledge and badly needed databases on their "birds—butterflies—botany." A very promising youngster, S. Thejaswi, has done just this with birds, focusing on a tank, in his Mysore City, for many years. But just one habitat will not suffice. He will need to also focus his exemplary attention on other habitats (both wild and man-made) in his quadrant and at least some of the 8 others encircling it. Maybe I am asking for too much, perhaps, but in a country with 2,000+ colleges and 200+ Universities teaching Biology, with lakhs of students, perhaps finding the 250-500 dedicated volunteers to monitor each 1° quadrant covering this sub-continent, or our country at least, may be possible, if seriously attempted and carefully "conducted" by us seniors?

Naipaul's commentary is revealing. I am one Indian who chose to return to his native land—abounding with a rich, unknown biodiversity waiting to be sampled, researched and analysed—after being exposed to the highest level of instruction and guidance in one of the top scientific institutions abroad. Unlike the stream of "foreign-returned" scientists that Naipaul writes about, I have consciously steered clear of the native "group-trap" and of dumb "obedience," and have tried to maintain my intellectual independence and individuality. This has not been easy and I have had to face all kinds of problems. I say this here not to exalt myself but to give explanations for my (oft-questioned) 'attitude' and approach to a Science I hold dear and which fuels my life, my very existence.

Through this column, in the last 5 and a half years, I have had the opportunity to vent my ideas, frustrations, and desires related to our Ornithology. What I am now saying is that we need to do an about turn with our strategies and bird study goals. The first requirement of a bird watcher is to stop looking at a political map to document bird distributions. If he/she uses a physical map instead, with relief portrayed on it, I contend that ranges will become clearer and biologically meaningful. I have been using Kazmierczak's maps, along with the "Grimskipp's" plates, and the more extensive texts of Ali & Ripley, Baker, Oates & Blanford, of Hume, and of Blyth, to prepare lists of the bird "species" recorded from each of the 10 biogeographical areas I recognized and mapped in my Letter # 44 (Pitta 122-123, June-July 2001). The experience is revealing. Krys' maps are praiseworthy, extremely useful and corroborate my biogeographical reasoning.

Birdwatchers now need also to analyse the past databases with "inquiry and scholarship" and not to either ignore them as "outdated" or venture to trust them as the "Bible truth." I have pointed out that I consider the OLD FAUNA of Oates & Blanford (1889-1898) the best analysed and summarized database (which was Whistler's "guide"), this based on my own critical researches and a comprehensive survey of most of our important published literature on birds. From Baker's NEW FAUNA to what I call "The lazy birders' do-it-yourself guidebooks" of today, I see a progressive dilution of scholarship and critical enquiry. Only Abdulali's questions and analyses in his incomplete serial "Catalogue of the Birds in the B.N.H.S. Collection" (in the *JBNS*) reveals a sense of enquiry and thoughtful analysis, based on the holistic attitude of a person who really knew our birds and their lives.

Conservation activists and 'managers' here have unfortunately adopted a "Gandhian" attitude to research. They envisage a 'magic' cure for the ongoing rapidly festering wound of "ecosystem decay," all over this richly endowed sub-continent, without the awareness or intelligence to first research into the causes. This is the tragedy of current priorities and the intellectual banality of our politicians and industrialists, right down to our tribals and the general public, who just 'take' but never give back anything to Mother Nature on whom they 'freeload' and believe they can go on doing so without any inkling of the major crisis that looms upon all human races. Like Gerald Durrell wrote, it is only the field naturalist, backed by the expertise of professional biologists with vast experience in the outdoors, who people will have to consult when decay threatens our very lives and that too in the not too distant future—David Quammen's "*The Song of the Dodo*" must be read by men and women who have the capacity to understand him, and then interpreted for the majority of humankind.

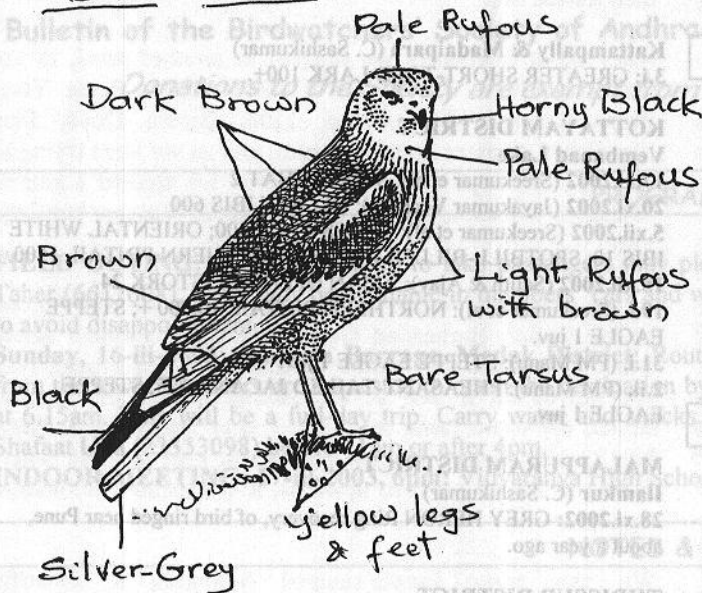
Kumar Ghopadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & flycatcher@eudoramail.com

"Renaissance or Continuity" pp. 169-174 in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, 174 pp. | V.S. Naipaul, 1977, PART THREE: Not Ideas, but Observations. Chapter 2—"A Defect of Vision" pp. 101-104, and Chapter 8—

2 Since March 2000 up to January 2003 (Pitta 107 to 141) I have written from A—2 on Indian Ornithology in my Letters # 33—38 (note the initial capital letter of each text portion) and introduced my reasoning on the mistaken species limits of our avifauna and the need to research our 1° quadrants in detail, to become cognizant of the real status and diversity of our bird life today. "Ecosystem decay," "threatened" and "endemic" birds, and catch words, which amount to really very little and lead us astray. "Science is a quintessentially human activity, not a mechanized, robotic accumulation of objective information, leading by laws of logic to inescapable interpretation." In my quote of late S.I. Gould (Pitta 137: 2) this master of revolutionary evolutionary thought had dipped—"Science is a quintessentially human activity, not a mechanized, robotic accumulation of objective information, leading by laws of logic to inescapable interpretation." There is no science without philosophy and no philosophy without science. I quote the latest "Indian" Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul (after Khurana and Sen were selected and honoured in the recent past) above, to make a point—I believe "Sir Vidya's" analysis of us Indians, the Indian lifestyle and ethos merits close scrutiny and attention, if not serious contemplation as well, by bird watchers or scientists or whoever.

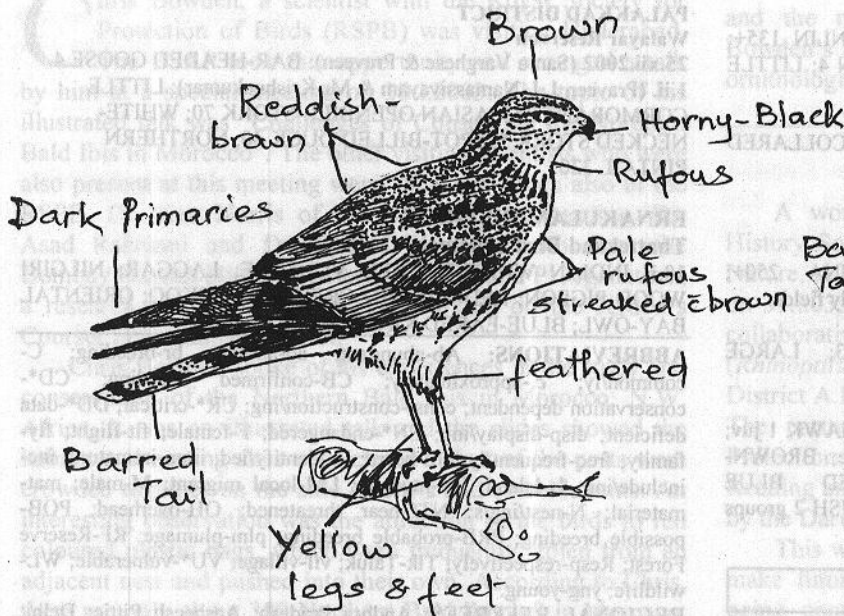
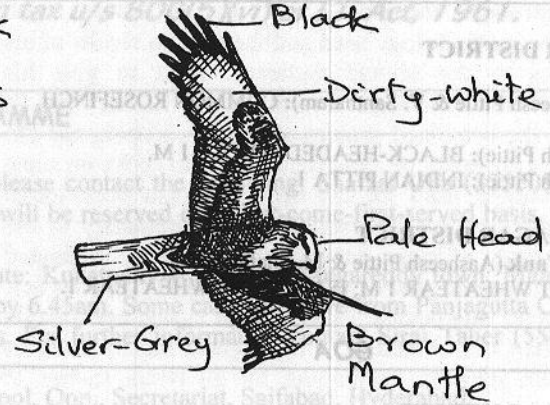
FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

ADULT MALE



EURASIAN MARSH HARRIER
(*Circus aeruginosus*)

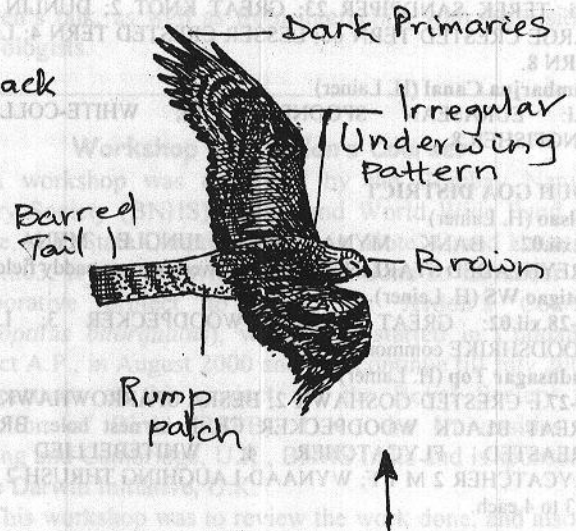
Kite -; 50-56cms.



ADULT FEMALE

MONTAGUS HARRIER
(*Circus pygargus*)

Kite -; 46-50 cms.



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '*' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH**CHITTOOR DISTRICT****Rishi Valley**

25-26.i (Aasheesh Pittie & V. Santharam): COMMON ROSEFINCH 100+.

26.i (Aasheesh Pittie): BLACK-HEADED ORIOLE 1 M.

27.i (Aasheesh Pittie): INDIAN PITTA 1.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT**Palmakole Tank (Aasheesh Pittie & M. Shafaat Ulla)**

14.1: DESERT WHEATEAR 1 M; ISABELLINE WHEATEAR 1.

GOA**NORTH GOA DISTRICT****Chapora Estuary (H. Lainer)**

9.i: OYSERCATCHER 3; BARTAILED GODWIT 9; PALLAS'S GULL 14; BLACKHEADED GULL 15000+; BROWNHEADED GULL 6000+; SLENDERBILLED GULL 32; LESSER CRESTED TERN 187; LARGE CRESTED TERN 17; SANDWICH TERN 48.

Neura Wetlands (H. Lainer)

10.i: GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 3; CURLEW SANDPIPER 26.

Aagassaim Mudflats (H. Lainer)

11.i: TEREK SANDPIPER 23; GREAT KNOT 2; DUNLIN 135+; LARGE CRESTED TERN 66; LESSER CRESTED TERN 4; LITTLE TERN 8.

Cumbarjua Canal (H. Lainer)

24.i: EURASEAN SPOONBILL 16; WHITE-COLLARED KINGFISHER 8.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT**Velsao (H. Lainer)**

23.xii.02: BANK MYNA 20-25; JUNGLE MYNA 250+; GREYHEADED STARLING 100+ on powerline over paddy fields.

Cotigao WS (H. Lainer)

25-28.xii.02: GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 3; LARGE WOODSHRIKE common.

Dudhsagar Top (H. Lainer)

25-27 i: CRESTED GOSHAWK 2; BESRA SPARROWHAWK 1 juv; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER CB F in nest hole; BROWN-BREASTED FLYCATCHER 4; WHITEBELLED BLUE FLYCATCHER 2 M 1 F; WYNAAD LAUGHING THRUSH 2 groups of 3 to 4 each.

KERALA**KANNUR DISTRICT****Kattampally (C. Sashikumar)**

29.x.2002: GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE.

20.xii.2002: MARSH HARRIER 15; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 10; BOOTED EAGLE 1; OSPREY 2; COOT 100.

Kattampally & Madaipara (C. Sashikumar)

3.i: GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK 100+.

KOTTAYAM DISTRICT**Vembanad Lake**

17.xi.2002 (Sreekumar et al): STONE CHAT 2

20.xi.2002 (Jayakumar Vechoor): GLOSSY IBIS 600

5.xii.2002 (Sreekumar et al): GLOSSY IBIS 600; ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS 10; SPOTBILL-BILLED DUCK 4; NORTHERN PINTAIL 1500.

15.xii.2002 (Sajith & Ajay): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 24.

19.i. (Sreekumar et al): NORTHERN PINTAIL 10,000 +; STEPPE EAGLE 1 juv.

31.i. (PM Manu): STEPPE EAGLE 1 juv.

2.ii. (PM Manu): PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 125; STEPPE EAGLE 1 juv.

MALAPPURAM DISTRICT**Ilamkur (C. Sashikumar)**

28.xi.2002: GREY HERON Ring recovery, of bird ringed near Pune, about a year ago.

THRISSUR DISTRICT**Kole wetlands (Eldhose KV)**

29.xi.2002: STEPPE EAGLE 1.

PALAKKAD DISTRICT**Walayar Reservoir**

25.xii.2002 (Sanju Varghese & Praveen): BAR-HEADED GOOSE 4.

1.ii. (Praveen J, L Namassivayam & Mr. Krishnakumar): LITTLE CORMORANT 243; ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 70; WHITE-NECKED STORK 5; SPOT-BILLED DUCK 40; NORTHERN PINTAIL 320.

ERNAKULAM DISTRICT**Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary (M Satyan)**

10.i: INDIAN WHITE-BACKED VULTURE; LAGGAR; NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON; RED-WINGED CRESTED CUCKOO; ORIENTAL BAY-OWL; BLUE-EARED KINGFISHER.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jandar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

A. 15/IV
2003

PITTA



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 144: April 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 28-iv-2003: Kasu Brahmananda Reddy (KBR) National Park, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad: This will be a morning trip. Sightings of Blackwinged Kites and Ashy Swallow-Shrikes can be expected. Plenty of Warblers and scrubland birds. The lake is dry and this could mean the absence of the resident water birds such as Spotbills and Lesser Whistling Teal. Carry plenty of water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

EDITORIAL

Many ornithological societies in the United Kingdom and Europe, specially request their members to give standing instructions to their banks to debit their bank accounts every year and pay their annual subscriptions directly to the society. Some such method we feel has become necessary now for the BSAP, a nationally known and accepted bird conservation NGO in Andhra Pradesh. Last year's membership for all categories stood at around 400 (all over India but the majority from A.P.) and it was expected that it will go up to at least 500 this year. Unfortunately this did not happen. To add to this shortfall in expected increase in membership, there have been substantial drop-outs of existing members in the last three years as also in earlier years. In spite of concerted efforts by some members, making individual approaches to get renewals or convert annual memberships to life, the effect has not been very encouraging. This can mean two things – the members are not able to derive as much benefit from the Society as expected to or, secondly, the Society has not been able to arrange programs, field trips, etc. to sustain the interest of its members; though the various camps that have been organised have had very good participation. We were forced to increase all categories of membership fees to offset the additional cost of printing and postage of PITTA and MAYURA. If one looks at the BSAP subscriptions dispassionately, it will be seen that it is rather a very small amount to pay for efforts and support to conserve our natural heritage. A meal for two at any good restaurant could cost you more than an annual membership.

The Society which has been tirelessly functioning for conservation, particularly birds, is unable to attract and retain the memberships and sustain the interest of the people. This is a disturbing factor. Interaction with the BSAP which is so lacking from members may not be very difficult with emails and websites becoming so common. When anyone takes up membership of any natural history organisation, it is mostly for the reason that one subscribes to the objectives and less for its location and conveniences. Many such organisations are totally dependant on the subscriptions received and a few survive on the projects the undertake for other scientific societies, government departments, etc. BSAP is still very much dependant on the membership fee and subscriptions, though we have been looking up in the last two years with some small projects. So far we have just about managed our affairs, thanks to the support and efforts put in by the office bearers and some members. There are some things which come gratis like emails, sketches and paintings in PITTA and MAYURA, Asian Waterfowl Count expenses (except xeroxing of forms), but for many other works we have to pay.

There are several ways in which you can contribute your mite to make YOUR Society a self-supporting organisation. Each one of us could, and should, enroll at least two members every year, and immediately membership will get more than doubled. Those who are finding it difficult to keep a track of their renewals can convert to Life Membership. Persons who have good contacts can persuade their friends to take Corporate Membership, which is better when compounded for five years. Also, donations are most welcome and this will allow the donor to claim 50% exemption from tax u/s 80G (5)(vi) of the I.T. Act of 1961. Sponsoring issue(s) of PITTA or MAYURA will also be of great help. So lets put all our efforts and try to lift the BSAP to its deserving place - - - Right at the Top.

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP Happenings - Field Trip to Manjira

Nikhil, N. *

It was a cool, dark but active day, the 16th of march. At 6 am all the birders met at Punjagutta. We left in 4 cars to Manjira dam. It was a pleasant journey of about an hour and a quarter. We reached Manjira at 7.50 am, we had stopped on the way to see some of the most beautiful Wagtails. There were Yellow and Grey Wagtails accompanied by a solitary Egret and a Pond Heron in a field. Some distance away we saw a pipit and a couple of Drongos who seemed to be the Wagtail's guardian angels as they were hovering above them. The beauty of a Kingfisher that was a few feet away also struck us.

The birds might have been fed up with this exhibition because they all went in search of a more peaceful place. But the Drongos and the Wagtails stayed back. We watched them for some time then left. On reaching the dam we went to the education center where we gathered some valuable information about the wildlife here. There was an enclosure where four crocodiles were kept in captivity.

We then went towards the reservoir. Sitting on the bund we could see a number of Bee-eaters, Cormorants, Whistling Teals, Moorhens, Egrets, Coots, River Terns, and Cotton Teals. We could also see a couple of pairs of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas.

We went on to the dam from which we got a magnificent view of the area around us. We saw some elusive but beautiful Little Blue Kingfishers some Dusky Crag Martins, and some Blue Tailed Bee-eaters. We also saw a Purple Heron, Swifts and Swallows.

Vinay, Prashant and myself were perhaps the luckiest in the group, for we saw a crocodile hunting. We were walking the bund some 20 feet from the water to see some Weaver Birds in the reeds, when we heard a great splash. All three of us stood rooted to the spot. Even Kiran who heard the splash, came round to check what happened. We could not see the Weaver Bird but could see the huge snout of the crocodile closing on a Purple Moorhen. It was an elegant bird.

We left Manjira dam at 12.30 pm, and stopped at a wayside lake to see Redwattled Lapwings, Stilts, Garganeys, Whiteneked Stork and Rosy Starlings.

After this trip I have always felt that nature has its own ways.

* The note on the BSAP trip to ICRISAT in the last issue of Pitta, was also written by Nikhil. We regret the omission.

Flights of Fancy - A visit to Vizag Hills

Sheetal Vyas

It was the Scarlet Minivet that did it. A flutter of the most brilliant red - no, scarlet - you've ever seen. And it's enough to hook and reel in any novice nibbling

halfheartedly at the bait.

Whoa, stop! What are we talking about here? Red paint? Of course, not. Ah, fishing? Well, no. What, birding?! Yes, birding. Dictionary definition: to observe or identify wild birds in their natural environment. In truth, an addictive habit that could change your life rather drastically.

To start at the very beginning, it was a birding trip by the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP) to Tyda, near Araku, Visakhapatnam. This was to be a three-day trip dedicated to birds in the Eastern Ghats. It sounded like fun, and it was!

We were greeted in Tyda by an emerald dove that flew across in a promise of things to come.

First day, we piled into cars and rumbled along to the Tatipudi reservoir. Waterbirds! Grebes, an Osprey eagle, widgeons, lapwings, cormorants, open-billed storks (nearly 200 of them!), egrets. Make no mistake, birding can be frustrating. There! someone will exclaim, a pied kingfisher! And you swivel madly, adjusting your binoculars as you go - trying to get a fix on the exact location. Minutes later, you come to a bare-looking stump. Look around you and everyone's finished with the now-missing kingfisher and moved on to the river terns. Grrr! Speed, my friend, is of the essence!

Next day Anantagiri. And what a haul it was: Golden orioles, black naped orioles, verditer flycatchers, nuthatches, chestnut-headed bee-eaters, a barred jungle owlet that sat still for hours, a chloropsis and of course, the scarlet minivet.

It takes a while for a wet-behind-the-ears birdwatcher to get the hang of it. First there's the little matter of spotting a timid little flutter in dense foliage. Peer as you will, you can't tell if there is indeed a living creature in there. And then comes the noting of its size, form, colour, beak, markings - all on the basis of a single, very fleeting glimpse. And then the job of pinning an identity on this bird - wading through the 1300-odd species in India. Sigh! It comes, they tell you encouragingly, with experience.

Perhaps you won't be able to tell a Jungle mynah from a Brahminy mynah right away, but what birding does to you is amazing. You don't have to go to Tyda or any forest to get interested. Start with around your own home - you'll be surprised at the sheer variety that come calling.

In a way, it is fascinating what a little tuning in can do to your life. You'll begin to see birds that were always there. You'll develop a tendency to scan the skies, with a casual eye out for a raptor. You'll still in the middle of an errand, cock your head at the tuk tuk call of a coppersmith. If you're even halfway intrigued, birding is a hobby worth pursuing. BSAP is active in Hyderabad and is eager to recruit - especially youngsters. The society makes trips almost every month to

places in and around Hyderabad. There are experienced birdwatchers who'll be more than happy to give you pointers and share their experiences. Come along one day - you won't regret it.

07/02/2003

23: 68-69. BSAP Field camp 6-9 February 2003.

Tatipodi Reservoir, Vizianagaram, India

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)6

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)c.30

Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger* [pygmeus])c.150

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)6

Indian Pond-heron (*Ardeola grayii*)10

Openbill Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*)c.200

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)c.45

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)24

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)37

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)3

Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*)1

Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)1

Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*)2

Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*)4

White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)1

Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)2

Visakhapatnam Town & Tyda

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Indian Pond-heron (*Ardeola grayii*)

Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans*)

Shikra (*Accipiter badius*)

Doves and Pigeons (*Columbidae*)

Unidentified *Streptopelia* sp.

Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)

Rose-winged Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)

Asian Palm-swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis* [parvus])

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)

Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*)

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)

Whiteheaded Babbler (*Turdoides affinis*)

Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)

White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*)

House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)

Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)

Pied Myna (*Sturnus contra*)

Crested Goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*) Probable

Breeding female, male

Male displaying with puffed cotton-white under-tail coverts and shivering lowered wings in mid-flight. Possible construction of nest in fork of tree. Seen shifting twigs.

Indian Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*)1

Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica*)

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*)

Large Green Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*)

Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)

Woodpeckers (*Picidae*) Unidentified woodpecker.

Black-winged Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melaschistos*) 1 male

Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melanoptera*)

Black-crested Bulbul (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*) Race

flaviventris.

Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)

White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*)

Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*)

Large-billed Leaf-warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*)

Indian Scimitar-babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*)

Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)

08/02/2003

23: 73. BSAP Field Camp 6-9 February 2003.

Araku, Vishakhapatnam District, India

Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus* [superciliosus])

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Indian Pond-heron (*Ardeola grayii*)

Crested Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus* [apivorus])

Shikra (*Accipiter badius*)

Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)

Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*)

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)

Blyth's Reed-warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*)

Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)

Breeding

08/02/2003

7:35 to 10:30

23: 70-71. BSAP Field camp 6-9 February 2003.

Anantagiri, Vishakhapatnam District, India

Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) Probable Breeding Male

displaying.

Banded Bay Cuckoo (*Cacomantis sonneratii*)

Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*)

Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)

Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*)

White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

Little Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*)

Large Green Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*)

Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)

Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*)

Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*)

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)

Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*)

Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*)

Tickell's Leaf-warbler (*Phylloscopus affinis*)

Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*)

humei Mary Peacock.

Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*)

Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*)

Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina*)

Yellowcheeked Tit (*Parus xanthogenys*)

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*)

Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)

Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)

Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*)

Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)

Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)

House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)

Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)

Pied Myna (*Sturnus contra*)

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
 Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*)
 House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

08/02/2003 11:10 to 11:30

23: 72. BSAP Field camp 6-9 February 2003.

Sankrametta, Vishakhapatnam District, India

Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)

Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*)

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

09/02/2003

23: 75. BSAP Field Camp 6-9 February 2003.

Anantagiri, Vishakhapatnam District, India

Crested Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus* [apivorus])

Large Cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei* [caledonica])

Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*)

Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina*) 1 adult male

Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*)

Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)

Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)

Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*)

Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) 1

House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)

Ashy Swallow-shrike (*Artamus fuscus*)

Brahminy Myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

09/02/2003 16:30 to 18:00

23: 78. BSAP Field Camp 6-9 February 2003. This list is of birds seen on the way down the ghats, to Visakhapatnam.

Tyda, Vishakhapatnam District, India

Crested Treeswift (*Hemiprocne coronata* [longipennis])

Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) Tom Hash.

Malabar Whistling-thrush (*Myiophonus horsfieldii*) JVD

Moorty heard and saw it.

Quaker Babbler (*Alcippe poioicephala*) 4

Loten's Sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia*) 1 male In gully, parallel to Tyda camp.

Workshop on SACON/BSAP Project on Inland Wetlands of A.P.

On 5th March 2003, a joint workshop of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Nature Conservation (SACON) and the BSAP was held at the environmental Education Centre in the Kasu Brahmananda Reddy (KBR) National Park in Hyderabad. The main purpose of the workshop was to present the findings of the BSAP project teams to the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department, with a view to deciding whether and which wetlands were deserving of protection. The workshop was attended by SACON scientists Dr. Vijayan and Dr. Prasad. The Addl. Principal Chief

Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Shri Hitesh Malhotra was the principal invitee along with other Forest Department officials. Also present were about 15 BSAP members who had participated in the project. For the BSAP, Humayun Taher made the presentation on the findings of the Project.

Important issues were discussed and the officials of the Forest Department pointed out that some waterbodies, particularly in Anantapur District were not covered in the project but which had good populations of wildfowl. It was proposed that these areas would be taken up in the next stage of the project at a later date. Meanwhile, those lakes which appeared to be in need of immediate protection were proposed during the workshop. The department officials have promised to look into the matter. A copy of the BSAP Project Report was presented to the Forest Department on this occasion.

Indoor Meetings

It has been decided to temporarily discontinue the monthly meetings of the society which were held on the third Monday of every month at the Vidyananya School. In future, indoor meetings will be held only as and when required or as the occasion demands. The date, time and place will be communicated to the members either through the PITTA or individually.

THANK YOU!!!

On the afternoon of 6th April 2003, the stormy weather, heavy rains, hailstorm and lashing winds created quite a havoc in the twin cities. The BSAP office on road no. 3 Banjara Hills was also affected. One of our members, Nand Kumar (Nandu to most of us), who lives nearby very thoughtfully opened the office rooms and found one room to be totally flooded, with rainwater having flowed through a gap below the door. Single-handedly, and with just a torch, he shifted the books, magazines and all other material from the three trunks into a safe place in the next room. But for his presence of mind, all this would have been totally damaged. So, each and every one of us owe Nandu a big Thank You. Aasheesh and Shafaat went the next morning and got the mess cleaned up. To them also we are grateful.

Book Donations

We are grateful to Mr. A. A. Aziz, a member, who has kindly donated several issues of the Journal of the BNHS and Hornbill to the Society's Reading Room.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST— 60

"I think I'd reached the point where it wasn't really doing anything for me. I mean, in the early stages of birding, keeping a list—keeping life lists, or a yard list, county lists, whatever—gives you an incentive to get out, and I think it's good in that way. I mean, I'm not anti-listing. There are a lot of good things about it. And I know a lot of cases where someone decides to work on their county list and as a result they discover a whole lot about the distribution of birds, and all sorts of good discoveries come out of it. But I was really interested in studying how to identify birds, and working on a list doesn't do a thing for teaching you how to identify birds. Because what you really need to do is spend more time looking at things even when you already know what they are, studying and taking in details [emphasis mine—K.G.]. For me, I was living in Arizona. I had a life list that was way up there and a big Arizona state list. But I got to the point where if I wanted to study identification, then it meant sitting at some particular pond and spending hours just looking in great detail at the Baird's Sandpipers or something. Whereas, if I wanted to work on my list, what I would have to do would be to dash around from one pond to the next, or call the hotlines and go driving five hours out to the other edge of the state to look for something out there (and maybe not see it). So it required a completely different mindset. I figured that I really wasn't going to learn the fine point of identifying birds if I still had this incentive of chasing the birds for my list, so I just stopped. Then when I started traveling to other countries, I never got around to adding up, say, what happens when I add my Venezuela birds to the ones from Costa Rica and Mexico. I never added up a world life list. And there's been so much lumping and splitting that now I don't have the foggiest idea of how many species I've seen in any geographic area [emphasis mine—K.G.]. Except my back yard, and my wife keeps the list for that."

"I really want to know it. It's just not that satisfying to go out, and a bunch of sparrows fly up, and somebody says one was the Baird's Sparrow, and you sort of check it off. There's no satisfaction to that. Getting to the point where you know it's different, you can see that it's different—a lot of it is the appreciation factor, being able to know that this really is a different species. There aren't any two species that just differ in one field mark. If they're different species, there are going to be a lot of subtle differences between them [emphasis mine—K.G.]. And if you get to see all of those, then you are learning more about the world. You have a better understanding of the world around you if you can get some sense of how this species fits into it."

[Kenn Kaufmann on why he stopped being a lister, *Pitta* 80: 2; © Diane Porter 1977]

This "Letter" will dwell on the Japanese Shrike, *Lanius superciliosus* Latham (# 950a), in the Lower Gangetic Plain. In December (*Pitta* 142: 1-2) the editors quoted Nikhil Devasar, of the "Delhibird" mailing list on the internet, informing readers of "a new record for India" of what was thought to be a "subspecies" of the Brown Shrike which was observed and photographed at Narendrapur near Calcutta, by Sumit Sen and Sujan Chatterjee, in the first week of May 2002.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce our birders to badly needed analytical bird watching and database documentation for scientists to use as ornithological facts. First, I wish to underline my viewpoint that, in future, good colour (or even half-tone) photographs are going to be extremely important for identification and also as recognition guides for bird watchers and ornithologists alike. There are enough of bird skins and eggs available in museums for the taxonomist, even though some real important "missing links" need to be sampled and added to collections. Bird watchers should carry a camera along and take pictures of the rarer species they see for help in correct identifications later by experts. The OBC Image Database (*Pitta* 139: 2-3), is an extremely laudable endeavour and all birders should help them add to their photographic library, especially by including also some currently held "subspecies" which will be shown to be real species by me and other systematists in future.

Second, I would also like to emphasize that all "new" records should be carefully whetted by experts who have long familiarity with bird bibliographies before publication of the finding(s). In this connection Aasheesh Pittie's CD-Rom database (almost 20,000 indexed references) on our sub-continent's Avifauna is again very useful and all help must be given him to complete it, keep it updated, heighten accuracy by referral to original literature, and prepare easily usable indices to species and to biogeographical sub-areas at least, not political units. Why not political districts, states or countries? Simply because birds do not care about them or recognize these human mapped boundaries, nor is it in their interest except for finding and inhabiting appropriate habitat for food and/or nesting. As I have almost completed and will document bird lists for each biogeographical area for readers soon, physical maps with relief and vegetation shown are very important to be able to understand bird species distributions and preferences.

Having said this let me go on to the subject in question—what was assumed to be a race of the Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus* Linnaeus # 949)—which the two Bengali birders stumbled upon and had the presence of mind to photograph and attempt a correct ID by experts. In Science sentiment has no place and any excitement must follow confirmation of what is presumed to be a novel finding. Though the final identity pronounced by the "international authority on Shrikes" and by the author of an updated field guide on Birds of the Indo-Chinese peninsula ("S.E. Asia") is accurate, only incomplete data on this Japanese Shrike's records in our sub-continent were given (*Pitta* 142: 2). Such incomplete knowledge stems from lack of time to absorb the really voluminous published literature on our birds or from unscientific models used like political divisions for bird distributions and, basically, unsatisfactory biogeographic education and learning. Sufficient field experience with living birds here (like Sâlim Ali used to repeatedly emphasize in his writings), is also critical for a good understanding of our avifauna—taxonomy and life-cycles. Like I have written earlier, knowledge is of two kinds—one is what you already know and the other is where to find what you do not know (*vide* Confucius).

A major folly of modern ornithologists is that they simply seem to ignore and/or overlook the 19th century databases in print. This may be due to lack of accessibility to these old tomes or to a fatal trust in the later "summaries" compiled as Handbooks or Guides. One vital reality we must absorb is that before our independence from British rule our habitats were fairly undisturbed or minimally vandalized by logging or large scale farming. There were more birds then and they had more extensive special habitats to find and use. The British (mainly) bird watchers really built up our databases, did a lot of "footwork" and really knew our bird species (no "subspecies" were required then before Hartert and the "Rothschild Gang" at Tring, and some Americans, forced this "racial" concept on taxonomists). Unless you have a more or less complete idea of how much information there is in old publications and where you can find it (Pittie will be helpful and so will I) I would recommend not getting "carried away" by such

purported "new" records. The recent Handbooks and Guides are convenient summaries based on improperly analyzed available data, so be careful. And like I am proceeding to show, many of the so-called "subspecies" of Sâlim Ali & Ripley, some carried forward almost in their entirety by recent Field Guides but most of these "races" ignored, will turn out to be real, reproductively isolated if not also allopatric, species like good systematists are now finding out with bush larks (Abdulali 1978, Alström 1998), Scops owls (Rasmussen 1998), flycatcher-warblers (Martens *et al.* 1999, Alström & Olsson 2000), bush warblers (Dickinson *et al.* 2000), vultures (Rasmussen & Parry 2000), spotted eagles (Parry *et al.* 2002), and others.

What is on record about *Lanius superciliaris* from our sub-continent then? Nikhil Devasar did well to check with perhaps the best experts for confirmation of the Shrike ID. Pamela also went one step better in bringing to attention Abdulali's record published in his BNHS Collection Catalogue (*JBNHS* 73: 496-497; 1977). But the single *Lanius superciliosus* specimen lost on return posting from the Smithsonian Institution (U.S.A.) was a male according to Abdulali and perhaps wrongly quoted as a "female" by Ripley in his NEW SYNOPSIS (pp. 266-267)? That apart, there are more records of this species from our sub-continent. Yes, I would treat it as a reproductively isolated, and allopatric in breeding season, species distinct from the Brown Shrike, *sensu stricto*. Inglis' specimen collected on 17th November 1907 near his home at Baghownie, Tirhut (I could not find this exact location on maps!) near Darbhanga (south of Madhubani) in north Bihar is the most western record of this Japanese Shrike. Checking my bibliographic database I found that Cripps (*Stray Feathers* 7: 269-270; 1878) had collected a male *Lanius superciliosus* near Faridpur (now in Bangladesh) west of Dacca, and about 150km north-east of Calcutta, on 23rd April 1878, which was identified by Hume who appended his own comments in Cripps' paper on the "...Birds of Furreedpore, Eastern Bengal." (*SF* 7: 238-315; 1878). Hume stated that he also had in his collection (now at Tring) "two or three other Indian adults inseparable from Malayan ones..." (meaning *L. superciliosus*) which should be checked by experts at Tring for IDs and data. Besides this, perhaps Inglis himself (and others in north-east India) collected more *superciliosus* (? bird collections in museums should be searched) and his papers on the Birds of Darbhanga District in the *JBNHS* (Vols 13-15, 19) may have more details? Jerdon (1862) had mentioned *L. superciliosus* (1: 406) in his primal "Handbook" and also Hume (as a synonym), in his Checklist (*SF* 8: 91, 148).

One look at plates 18 (Japanese Shrike) and 19 (Brown Shrike) painted by the legendary H. Grönvold in Lord Medway & Wells' THE BIRDS OF THE MALAY PENINSULA (5: 364-365; 1976) will show clear-cut diagnostic differences of these species that have inexplicably been "lumped" as one now! Oates (OLD FAUNA 1: 469) wrote that *superciliosus* was "a very distinct species confined to Japan. . ." Like Hume (*SF* 7: 270) who was confused, even Abdulali (*JBNHS* 73: 496-497) found "considerable variation" in colour of upperparts, barring on underparts and intensity of black eye-stripes in "Brown Shrikes." Oates (OLD FAUNA 1: 469) pointed out that some Brown Shrikes oversummered (and bred?) in the Andamans and in continental India as well. Stuart Baker "took a good many nests in the North Cachar Hills" (NEW FAUNA 2: 301) and also on the Khasi Hills (*JBNHS* 17: 793; 1907). *Lanius collurioides*, the distinct Burmese Shrike, has bred in Meghalaya according to Baker, but Ripley wanted confirmation. Ripley (NEW SYNOPSIS p. 266) perhaps correctly analyzed that Baker's breeding shrikes in the Assam-Burma area "probably belong to the subspecies *lucionensis*" and his specimens "trapped on the nest" should be checked in the Bulgarian Natural History Museum in Sofia (have Pamela and Norbert followed up Ripley's surmise?). Field ornithologists in north-east India should likewise look out for nesting "brown shrikes."

Lanius lucionensis Linnaeus (# 950), incorrectly named the "Philippine Shrike," is actually a Chinese Shrike breeding in the Sino-Tibetan and Sino-Japanese biogeographical areas (see my Map in December's *Pitta*). *Lanius superciliosus* is a Japanese Shrike breeding on the Japanese archipelago in the east of my Sino-Japanese biogeographical area. The Brown Shrike, *Lanius cristatus* (*sensu stricto*) breeds in the Siberian and Arctic biogeographical areas. Howard & Moore's WORLD CHECKLIST (1984: 379) gives also *L. c. confusus* Stegman as another race of the "Brown Shrike" and this needs to be evaluated for its actual status—good species or synonym. A glance at the fine plate 89 by Carl D'Silva in the POCKET GUIDE and that by Ber van Perlo in the FIELD GUIDE (pl. 60) will show up the limitation of colour paintings in indicating true shades (that is why colour photographs are superior) besides the minor but distinct differences in the "races" involved. Howard & Moore I think erred in placing *Lanius isabellinus* Hemprich & Ehrenberg (# 943) and *L. phoenicuroides* Schalow (# 942) as subspecies of *L. collurio* Linnaeus (# 941), like Ripley (NEW SYNOPSIS p. 264) did. The former is now recognized as a distinct species, which is correct, but the latter must also be given separate species status like Oates (OLD FAUNA 1: 455-471; 1898) had done. These to me resemble the "Brown Shrike" *L. cristatus* superspecies more than the Red-backed Shrike under which Howard & Moore placed them. Phylogenetic (cladistic or whatever) analyses need also to be done by systematic ornithologists like we entomologists do as a rule.

Like Leon Croizat found out, the Bay of Bengal is the dividing line between the Sino-Malayan and the Indian subregion faunas, and "Greater Bengal" (the old Bengal Presidency) is the marginal area where both elements occur. Even our "Jungle Crow" (unnecessarily re-named Large-billed Crow now) is different east of Calcutta.

This "new" finding is used by me here to bring out a few points for serious consideration by bird watchers and ornithologists working on the Indian sub-continent fauna. My Geographical Species Concept (GSC, see my December 2002 "Letter") could well be the "light in the tunnel" to enable objective taxonomists (together with field ornithologists' and birders' inputs) to be able to finally decide on correct species limits in our polytypic bird species. Therefore, current IDs of "Brown Shrike" as *Lanius cristatus* would actually be of a superspecies not species! This is true of several other shrikes that occur in the Indian sub-continent as well as of most polytypic species that are currently being lumped, for convenience.

FIELD CRAFT

By Humayun Taher

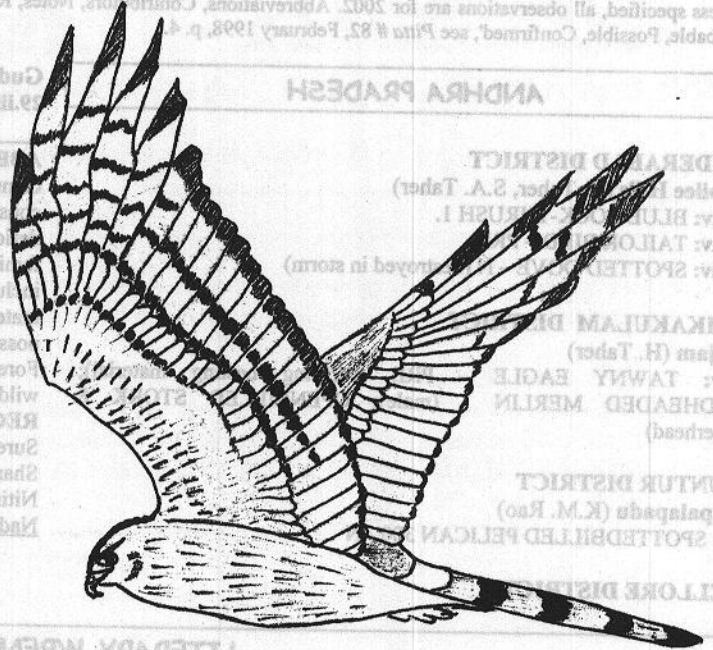
Circus macrourusPALLID HARRIER

46-51 cms.

Kite -

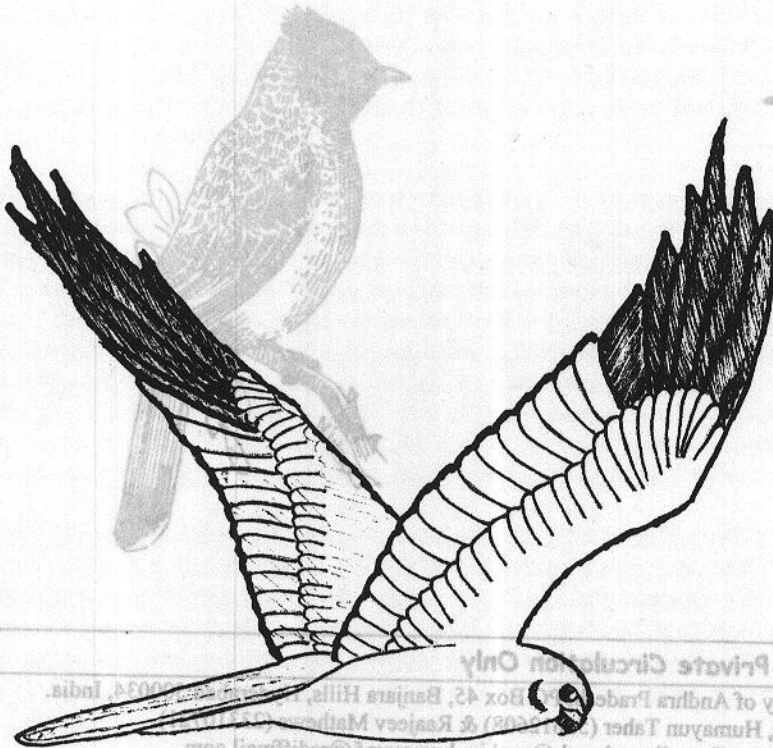
FEMALE.

- BROWN PLUMAGE.
- NO WHITE TAIL TIP.
- LARGER WHITE RUMP.
- WING BANDS NOT TOUCHING BODY.



LITERARY WRENDITIONS

I liked the two articles by Siraj Taher in the January Pitta. There are a pair of Phalarope Chickens in Dooda Gubbi...
Regards Zahar Futehally

MALE.

- GREY UPPERPARTS.
- WHITE UNDERPARTS.
- BLACK WINGTIPS.

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad-500034, India.
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Membership (Rs): Admission-100; Annual-200; Student-100 per annum. Life-2000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '**' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Jubilee Hills (H. Taher, S.A. Taher)

14.iv: BLUE ROCK-THRUSH 1.

10.iv: TAILOR BIRD - PRB

03.iv: SPOTTED DOVE - N (destroyed in storm)

SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT

Rajam (H. Taher)

2.iv: TAWNY EAGLE - PRB (carrying nesting material);
REDHEADED MERLIN 1 (male); OPENBILLED STORK 8
(overhead)

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu (K.M. Rao)

1.i: SPOTTEDBILLED PELICAN 300 - N

NELLORE DISTRICT

Gudur Tank (H. Taher)

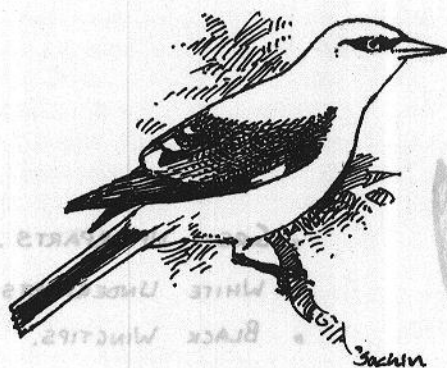
29.iii: PINTAIL DUCKS 20; SHOVELLER 15

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

I liked the two articles by Siraj Taher in the January *Pitta*. There are a pair of Pharaohs Chicken in Dodda Gubbi....
Regards Zafar Futehally



For Private Circulation Only

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IP PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 145: May 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608).

Sunday, 18-v-2003: Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.00am. There should be interesting summer sightings of warblers and flycatchers. Some of the resident birds will be nesting. Look out for nesting Indian Moorhens near the raptor enclosure. Also look for Small Greenbilled Malkoha and Crested Hawk Eagle near the entrance to the Lion Safari. For those so inclined – an ideal opportunity for observing exotic species in cages from close range! Keep an eye on the African Grey Parrot – it can imitate a tiger roar with great accuracy! This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

EDITORIAL

This is the first issue of a "NEW LOOK" Pitta. At a recent meeting of the editorial members, it was decided to make Pitta more "Interactive" and to try and incorporate items which would be of interest to more members. To this end, we have added a "FUN Column", which has a few interesting bird-related facts and a crossword puzzle. We plan to make this a regular feature in Pitta from now on. We would appreciate if the members give us their feedback on these changes and whether they are interesting (or not!!). Members are welcome to send us their own contributions, either in the shape of Interesting Bird Facts or, if they feel so inclined, make up a crossword puzzle for inclusion in this column.

NOTES & NEWS

**Happenings of the Society - Field Trip to Kasu
Brahmananda Reddy (KBR) National Park,
Hyderabad - 27.04.2003**

M. Shafaat Ulla

We all gathered promptly at 6:30 a.m. at the park entrance. It was a mixed crowd of mothers with children, teenagers, young and elderly. The most remarkable was Ashok Kumar who came directly to the park all the way from Nizamabad! I so much wish BSAP had more members like him. After waiting for a few minutes for late comers, our gang of 15 moved into the park and started birding in right earnest. After seeing a few Bulbuls, Doves and Sunbirds, we saw the Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*), a comparatively rare sighting, followed by a gregarious bunch of Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*).

We were proceeding towards the lake and were rewarded enroute by the sightings of Peacocks in full breeding plumage, Grey Partridge, Iora and Rufousbacked Shrike (*Lanius schach*), peacefully perched on a teak tree (*Tectona grandis*).

We finally reached the lake, which had shrunk considerably. When we neared the water's edge, we were startled by a sudden flurry of wing beats and fourteen Lesser Whistling Teals or Tree Ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*) took to the air. These ducks I understand, are resident or local migrants. Shortly thereafter a Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) flushed literally from under my feet and disappeared into the grass on the opposite side of the lake. A Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) took off laboriously and settled on a Babul Tree (*Acacia nilotica*) and was watching us with apprehension, even as a few Redwattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) were incessant with their calls of "did-you-do-it, did-you-do-it..."

After having disturbed the serene life on the lake, we proceeded in the direction of the exit gate through a different route. Suddenly somebody said "What's that?..." and all heads turned skywards. A magnificent raptor was gliding effortlessly high above us on the summer thermals. First we thought it was an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) because of the close proximity to the water body; then the popular opinion turned to Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhyncus*). Finally it remained unidentified, Aasheesh's presence notwithstanding.

(Editor's Note: Could it have been a Booted Eagle (*Heiraaetus pennatus*) of the Pale Morph?)

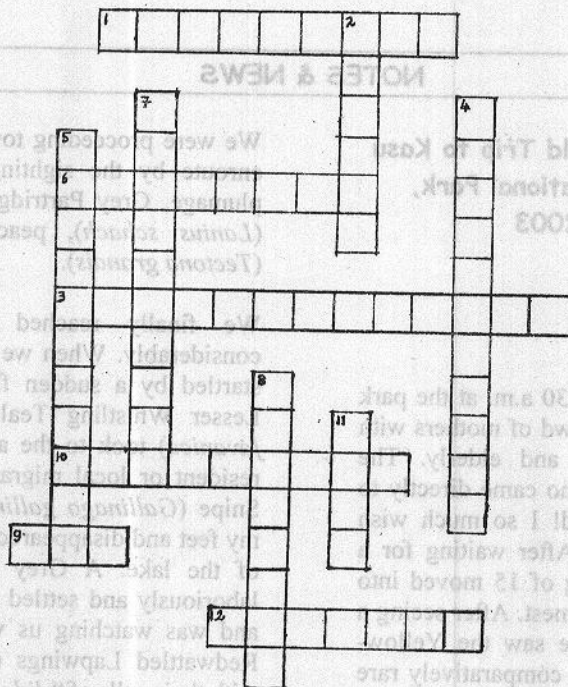
After having observed a few more bird species, mostly quite common, we were happy to reach the gate by about 10:30 a.m. as the sun had become quite hot. In all we recorded 27 bird species. A fairly reasonable total for a short summer morning trip.

BIRDWORD PUZZLE - No. 1

By M.M. Ali Khan

Note: Figures in Brackets denote number of alphabets
The puzzle contains bird names only
Correct solution to this puzzle will be given in the next issue of Pitta

1. Plays the flute on the beach, maybe. (9)
2. Find it in a lollipop lover's heart. (6)
- 3 & 7. Office going royal angler. (13, 10)
4. Work on an anvil but not with iron. (11)
5. RENEW minus e, and she sings beautifully. (11)
6. Both halves denote love and peace. (8)
8. Put THING before RAJ to get the bird. (8)
- 9 & 11. Result of sleeping on high pillow or catching a draught. (3, 4)
- 10 & 12. Big ashen talker. (5, 4, 7)



LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—61

“1. WHAT IS ECOLOGY?”

Ecology is the study of plants and animals (in the widest sense) in relation to their surroundings. It is in the meaning to be given to the term ‘surroundings’ that the real extent of the subject lies. One is inclined to think of surroundings as ‘just a bit of jungle’, as though it were quite fixed and subject to no change; but we must think of them instead as consisting of the earth on which the jungle grows and the rocks under the earth, as well as the atmosphere whose warmth or coldness and humidity influence the type of plants growing in the jungle, if we are to understand the relationship at all. This larger conception of the surroundings is referred to as a ‘habitat’, and the study of the habitat is the foundation of all ecological work. The ocean is just as much a habitat for the whale, and the body of the host is just as much a habitat for the parasite, as the jungle is for a tiger or a bird.

Having determined and described the habitat, the next logical step is to catalogue exhaustively the plants and animals and other livestock to be found there. In a full ecological survey this is done by the collection of specimens, and this is the only satisfactory way in which the identity of many species can be established beyond doubt. It is, however, still possible to do useful work without the collection of specimens. The fauna and flora having been adequately catalogued the way is open for the more interesting and complex aspects of the full survey—the study of the inter-relationship of animals and plants among themselves, the effects of changes in their environment brought about by such matters as changes in the food supply, by drought, flood and disease, and so on. There are many more factors which need not be mentioned here, for there will be few amateurs who are able or qualified to carry out work of such detail and complexity in such a way as to satisfy the scientists; for true ecology is rapidly becoming a science. To investigate fully the structure of a community and the effects on that community of the many variable factors which may play upon it, needs advanced scientific training, a good deal of equipment, the cooperation of the experts, and an abundance of time and patience.”

“It is not quite so easy to see just how investigations into the ways and habits of birds can benefit man in any material sense, but it must be remembered that this is as yet almost a virgin field which on close study may well reveal causes and effects hitherto quite unsuspected.”

“2. THE STUDY OF HABITATS

There is much useful work which can be done by the amateur who has neither the qualifications, nor the time, nor the inclination to join with others in a full ecological survey. In the forefront is the study of habitats.

Plant ecology got away to much earlier start than did animal ecology, and the geographers and plant ecologists have worked out from a mass of observations the major vegetation types for most of the world. The kinds of plants and trees that will grow in any particular place depend on many physical factors, such as the suitability of the soil and the climate.”

“By careful comparison of the plant associations in different parts of India, combined with a study of the geology and soils and particularly of the climatic conditions, it has been possible to plot on maps the areas where the plant associations have enough common characteristics to be considered as belonging to one particular type of vegetation. In each of these general types certain kinds of plants and trees are found to be dominant. And in each of them will be found many different local or minor plant associates possessing recognizable characteristics of their own, in each of which different kinds of plants and trees may be dominant. We speak, for instance, of teak forest or a mango or palm grove, when the dominant trees are teak or mangoes or palms; but other plants and trees are nearly always to be found in the same association, though to a lesser extent than the dominant species.

In the study and analysis of the birds to be found in these minor and major plant associations or habitats there is a great deal of scope for the bird-watcher. That different associations of birds are to be found in different habitats is almost an axiom. Compare the birds to be found in an extensive bamboo brake with those of the luxuriant Bengal jungle, with its rich undergrowth, or those of a Himalayan pine or rhododendron forest, and they will be seen to be quite different. Some species, however, may occur in each and much has still to be learnt about the exact habitats in which any given species can be found and the use to which each is put.”

“In this paper I include India, Pakistan and Burma in the title “India” for the sake of brevity; after all, birds can hardly be expected to recognize political boundaries.”

“H.G. Champion (1936) has worked out a comprehensive provisional classification of forest types occurring in India based on four temperature zones, tropical, sub-tropical, temperate and alpine, each subdivided according to moisture conditions as reflected by the relative importance of evergreen, deciduous and thorny trees. His main divisions . . . he subdivides into their various characteristic components and he also lists the subsidiary edaphic and several types occurring in each main group. Anyone proposing to undertake any ecological work which involves jungle of any description would do well to study this paper beforehand and to decide into which category the jungle concerned falls.

Champion’s classification covers only the forest types and it would be a very useful preliminary to future ecological work if an exhaustive (even if tentative) classification could be made of all other main habitat types occurring in India, and approved by some body of standing in order to minimize the risk of confusion in later comparative work.”

[M.D. Lister, 1951, “Birds and Ecology,” *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 50: 147-150.]

In my Letter # 3 (Pitta 69, January 1997) I had alluded to a series of papers by M.D. Lister on the ecology of birds and of bird associations in certain habitats. Last November (Pitta 139: 4-6) I had introduced the 1° latitude—longitude quadrant as the smallest unit for studies of habitats and their biodiversity in the Indian sub-continent. In future “Letters” I will enumerate the names of such quadrants in each biogeographical area which should be targeted for documenting, through proper surveys, the “birds—butterflies—botany” in every such 1° quadrant which each birdwatcher should try to monitor for the presence, abundance, status and life-cycle of birds, if not some other animal groups and plants as well. This will enable me to obtain a good idea of the occurrence of bird species in every 100 sq. km area of this sub-continent, keep and update a master file over the next couple of decades, and then analyse our Ornithological databases for incorporation into the proposed 3rd (revised) edition of the FAUNA OF INDIA, BIRDS.

Lister served in northern and eastern India (before our independence) with the Royal Air Force, during the Second World War, from 1943 to 1945. From 1951 to 1954 he published seven papers in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (Volumes 49-52) on “Birds and Ecology,” the bird associations of Bengal, the jungle, cultivated and waste lands, built-up areas, on secondary song of birds, and on the Ornithology of the Darjeeling area. These papers are extremely useful as models of what Indian bird watchers can achieve in their areas of residence and travel, which could then be used as databases by ornithologists. I recommend every serious birder, who is interested in adding to our knowledge of birds, to consult and study

Lister's papers and attempt to replicate his method while doing bird watching in the time they can give to this hobby. In future "Letters" of mine I will go into more detail about possible studies that may be conducted by any motivated bird watcher, but suffice here only to mention two of my own papers published in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers on "Serious Birdwatching" [NLBW 16(8): 1-6; 1976] which expanded on my earlier "Critique" [NLBW 13(8): 1-5; 1973] which may also be referred to for ideas of purposeful birding.

The type of habitat is critical in understanding the natural distribution of wild bird species, especially those that have not, and perhaps cannot, adapt to human modification or disturbance of their original undisturbed habitats. Our quest for a stable and continuous supply of food crops and also cultivation of other plants economically useful to us, either wild strains or genetically modified varieties by artificial breeding, has resulted in the destruction of massive naturo-ecosystems and the conversion of vast tracts of land into agro-ecosystems and urbo-ecosystems, which latter are dominantly artificial and in an advanced stage of "ecosystem decay." Most bird watchers living in cities and towns have little option but to visit such artificial, maximally modified, habitats in and around urbo-ecosystems, besides a favoured few who have opportunities to bird watch in less disturbed farmland away from metro cities and larger country towns in agro-ecosystems. Birding in artificial ecosystems where bird species have had to adapt to less favourable habitats and niches, automatically leads to inexact if not erroneous interpretation and analysis of the natural distribution and bio-ecology of wild bird species. Therefore, wide, pan-subcontinental ranges, as shown on some maps in the recent POCKET & FIELD GUIDES invoke my protest at such incorrectly perpetrated information doled out to gullible or vulnerable amateur bird watchers.

In his paper on "Birds and Ecology" (JBNHS 50: 147-156; 1951) Lister, as quoted above, had divided Indian habitats into five broad groups: Civilisation Group, Cultivation Group, Jungle Group, Waste Land Group, and Inland water Group. I have expanded on these a little and now present these broad categories, with their subdivisions, as follows:

I CIVILIZATION GROUP : a) Metro City, b) Country Town, c) Large Village.

II CULTIVATION GROUP : a) Dry land crops, e.g., wheat, jowar, groundnut, etc., b) Wet land crops, e.g., paddy, sugarcane, etc.

III JUNGLE GROUP : a) Moist Tropical Forests—wet evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, b) Dry Tropical Forests—dry deciduous, thorn, scrub-and-boulder, dry evergreen, c) Montane Subtropical Forests—wet hilly, pine, sholah, dry evergreen hilly, upland grassland, d) Montane Temperate Forests—wet temperate, moist temperate, dry temperate, e) Alpine Forests—alpine woodland, alpine scrub, f) Roadside Avenue Trees, g) Orchards, h) Tree Plantations on Plains, e.g., teak, saal, eucalyptus, casuarina, etc., i) Hill Plantations, e.g., coffee, tea, rubber, cardamom, etc.

IV WASTELAND GROUP : a) Open Dry Grassland, including aerodromes, b) Semi-Marshland, c) Marsh and Bog, d) Deserts, e) Above Timberline on mountains.

V INLAND AND MARINE WATERS GROUP : a) Large Rivers, b) Small Rivers, c) Nullahs, d) Mountain Streams, e) Jheels and Natural Lakes, f) Artificial Tanks, g) Estuaries and Backwaters, h) Rocky Beaches, i) Sandy or Muddy Beaches and Sand Dunes (also Salt Marshes).

Bird watchers and others interested in more details may consult Puri (1960), Mani (1974), and Gadgil & Meher-Homji (1985) or go to the original Champion & Seth revised edition (1968) for exhaustive summaries of vegetation types and ecological data pertaining to the Indian sub-continent.

The basic change of focus I am advocating to bird watchers, naturalists and even professional biologists is to try to understand and use the biogeographical areas of our sub-continent and neighbouring regions, and ignore the political boundaries (except for ease of finding built-up locations) that have been in use, generally, up to now. Here below I have computed the species diversity of birds, both resident (breeding) and migrant (also strays), in each of the 10 biogeographical areas of our sub-continent (see Map also) :

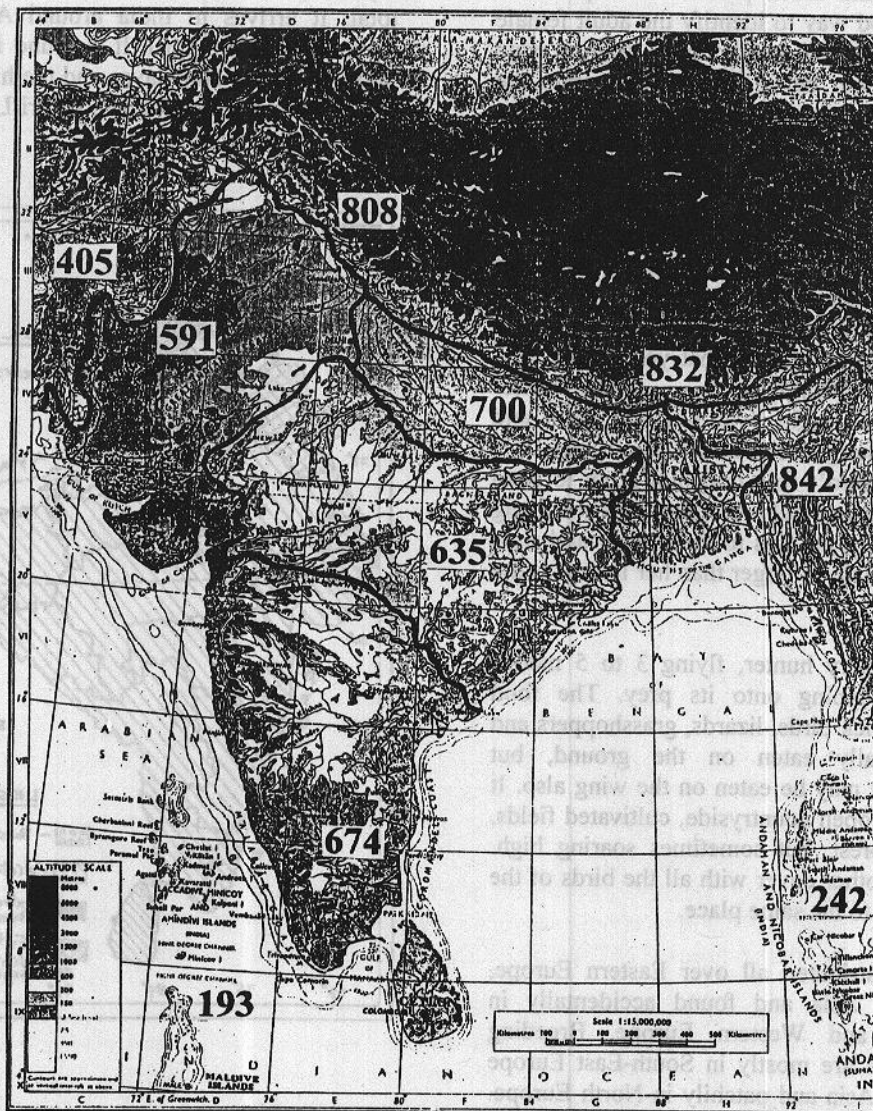
1. **Peninsular India & Ceylon** = 674 species (103 species endemic here; Ceylon 466 sp., *vide* Hoffman, 1996)
2. **Central Highlands** = 635 species (93± spp. are not found in Peninsular India+Ceylon)
3. **Plain of the Indus** = 591 species (103 spp. are found only here and not in the Gangetic Plain)
4. **Gangetic Plain** = 700 species (209 spp. are found only here and not in the Indus Plain)
5. **Assam** = 842 species (350± spp. are not found in Dravidia, i.e., Peninsular India+Ceylon & Central Highlands)
6. **Baluch—Afghan Highlands** = 405 species (1 sp. has been introduced here)
7. **Western Himalaya** = 808 species (152 spp. found only here and not in the Eastern Himalaya)
8. **Eastern Himalaya** = 832 species (179 spp. are found only here and not in the Western Himalaya)
9. **Laccadive—Maldiv—Chagos Archipelagoes** = 193 species (5 spp. have been introduced here)
10. **Andaman & Nicobar Islands** = 242 species (8 spp. have been introduced here)

The Peninsular India+Ceylon and Central Highlands together form "Dravidia" which relates to the ancient Indian Plate, of Gondwanaland ancestry. This area of **Dravidia** has some 766 bird species recorded, the resident endemic ones, outside of the Western Ghats, being mostly primitive forms, exclusive to this ancient geological landmass which has never been submerged under the ocean, as the novelist E.M. Forster (1924) wrote in his celebrated book "A Passage to India." This holds the source avifauna that has colonized (and speciated in) the recently uplifted Western Ghats, principally, as well as provided the newly formed Indo-Gangetic Plains and the Himalayas with perhaps many of their avifaunal stock. The combined Indo-Gangetic

Plains have some 800 bird species recorded, of which a little more than one-half are typically residents of this new biogeographical area. The great Himalayan mountain ranges, from the River Indus to the mighty Brahmaputra have about 985 species so far documented, of which around 655 could be termed exclusively Himalayan in origin and affinity. Species lists of all these 10 biogeographical areas are now ready for publication and those of other smaller sub-areas and sub-sub-areas, as well as of States, are in the course of preparation. I am still in the process of listing the bird species of Burma and these must be added to the 842 Assamese species so that this most bird diverse Assam—Burma biogeographical area probably boasts of more than 1,000 species, if not more ! Conversely, it is logical that the Baluch—Afghan Highlands and the Indus Plain avifauna sport the least bird diversity. The 188 recorded species list (excluding 5 introduced ones) from the Laccadive—Maldiv—Chagos Archipelagoes is impressive, when compared to just 234 (minus 8 introduced) species of birds so far known from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. When incorrectly “lumped” species are given their correct status in future, this bird species number will increase and perhaps swell the Bay Islands’ total, since it seems to me that these islands (once towering peaks on the Indian Plate ?) have been incompletely and rather poorly surveyed and sampled even until today.

Endemism in our sub-continent is certainly higher than the 176 species that Ripley (1961: xix-xxiii) identified in his OLD SYNOPSIS, or even more than the 297 that I recognized, tentatively (Ghorpadé, 2002: 17). Basically, as theorized in that “Open Letter” of mine (*Humea Field Ornithology* 3: 1-29), the species limits of our birds have been mostly wrongly analysed up until now and our avifauna is certainly much richer than what is put down in the SYNOPSES, HANDBOOK and recent FIELD GUIDES. Only a thorough scientific revision of our Systematic Ornithology (plus phylogeny) and a proper analysis of our birds’ identities and life-cycles, including their ecology, will reveal a true picture of Indian Ornithology. It is for this important task that volunteers are sorely needed to monitor, over the next twenty years, anything from a 1° quadrant to a biogeographical sub-sub-area, or a District. Bird watching in our sub-continent still has much original value, through yet unknown data to be discovered, and in no way is Indian Ornithology fully and satisfactorily documented.

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, c/o Doddagubbi P.O., Bangalore 562 149 & indiavifauna@yahoo.co.uk



BIRD SPECIES IN BIOGEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

SPOTLIGHT - PALE or PALLID HARRIER (*Circus macrourus*) By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in BirdLife International's Red Data Book. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

Like other harriers of the *Circus* genus, the Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrourus*), is a slender, elegant, long-winged and long-tailed raptor. Males of the species have pale-grey upper plumage with dark wingtips. It has a white head and crown. The underparts and throat are mostly white and the tip of the wings have a black patch. When sitting the wings in the Pale Harrier (*Circus macrourus*) are shorter than the tail. It has a black bill and yellow legs and feet. Adult females and immature birds are dark brown above with barred wings and tail and a white patch over the wings and the base of the tail. The females are streaked below and the juvenile birds are rich uniform rufous. While the adult males of all the *Circus* genus that visit the Indian sub-continent are fairly distinctive in the field, both sitting or in flight, most of the females and juveniles are very confusing as they are similar to each other and much practice is required to distinguish them. A good way to identify the adult female *C. macrourus* is that the black bands on the trailing edge of the wing, looking from below, never reach upto the body but fall short of it. Detailed or comparative descriptions of these birds is outside the scope of this article, so I shall not go any further...

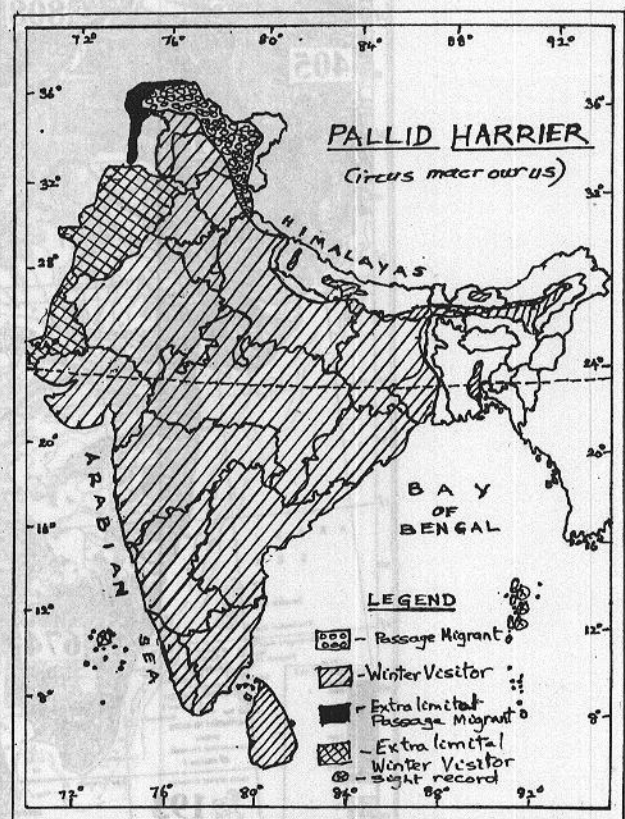
Pallid Harriers prefer to sit on the ground rather than perch on a tree, bush or mound. EHA (E.H. Aitken) describes the Pallid Harrier most beautifully in his book, COMMON BIRDS OF INDIA. He writes "... The Harrier is a frequent visitor to our land and one that you cannot pass without wanting to know what it is." "... so the Harrier ranges from morning till night over hill and plain and drops on the unlucky young lark or an incautious quail." "... but the sole of this bird's foot does not seem to need much rest. Long-winged and light-bodied, it skims along the grass and skirts the bush, dips to the hollow and rises to the mound. ..." "The lady is larger than her lord as is the fashion among hawks."

Pallid Harrier is a solitary hunter, flying 3 to 5 metres above ground and dropping onto its prey. The food consists of nestling or sick birds, lizards, grasshoppers and insects. Prey is usually eaten on the ground, but occasionally small prey may be eaten on the wing also. It mainly frequents stony open countryside, cultivated fields, grasslands or scrub forest, but sometimes soaring high. Roosts in reedbeds or other cover with all the birds of the neighbourhood coming to the same place.

Extralimittally, it is distributed all over Eastern Europe, East and South-West Asia and found accidentally in Britain, Scandinavia and Western Europe. Breeding grounds of this species are mostly in South-East Europe and West and Central Asia and patchily in North Europe. It has been occasionally found nesting in southern Russia. It winters in Africa, Sudan upto the Cape and the Indian Sub-continent. The nests on the ground are a bed of leaves

and grass in a natural hollow on a dry plain. The clutch is usually four to five eggs, mostly white but sometimes with large pale reddish or pinkish-grey blotches. Breeding season is normally April-May.

The Pallid Harrier is a widespread winter visitor to the Indian Sub-continent including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri-Lanka. The distribution in India is very widespread and ranges from Punjab, Rajasthan to Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh down south to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu upto Sri Lanka. It also migrates to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and the Maldives. Some of the largest numbers of birds have been reported from Gujarat, where at the Velavadar Blackbuck Sanctuary, the largest roost of Harriers, consisting of 1500 to 2000 birds, has been reported, in which the Pallid Harrier is about 10% of the total. It arrives in India around August-September and leaves by March-April. It is found in the plains and upto 3000 m., in the Himalayas and the highest hills both in the Eastern and Western Ghats. In Sri Lanka some birds have been noted in summer also.



The known historical records of the Pallid Harrier have been from the Halley's (now Corbett National Park, Uttar Pradesh), Dichpally, Medchal and Paloncha (all from Andhra Pradesh) and Chingleput in Tamil Nadu, from where a specimen is available. Recent records in Andhra Pradesh are from the districts of Medak, Ranga Reddy, Hyderabad, Chittoor, Cuddapah and West Godavari. In Kurnool, a very large roost of 800 to 1000 birds has been seen in the Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary. In this also, *Circus macrourus* are about 10% of the population. There are specific records from Saurashtra in Rajasthan. In Uttar Pradesh, in Corbett National Park, this Harrier is reported as an infrequent winter visitor, stopping in the park for short periods. It is assumed to be a passage migrant in the park and also in the neighbouring hills. It is a passage migrant also through northern Kashmir and the North West Frontier Provinces.

Though very widespread in the Sub-continent, the Pallid Harrier is never found in large numbers or seen often. This suggests that the numbers wintering in India are small. Habitat loss and shortage of food adds to the problem and, being voracious feeders, they are easily affected by these happenings. Moreover, in the breeding grounds where they spend the greater part of their time, farmers and range managers shoot them regularly, as they supposedly pose a threat to partridge, grouse and other game birds. In the Sub-continent also, these birds are trapped for the zoo trade and also for supply to falconers mostly in the Middle East and Pakistan. Hundreds of birds are trapped in North India alone, mostly in U.P., Delhi, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh, where the market price is about Rs. 200 per bird. They are then sent out through Nepal, Calcutta, Punjab and Mumbai to the markets in the Middle East and Pakistan, where it commands a very high price.

The Pallid Harrier is a difficult bird to learn about during its short winter stay in India. So it may not be wise to arrive at any conclusion unless detailed studies are made in its overall range.

BOOKS AND JOURNALS RECEIVED IN THE B.S.A.P. READING ROOM

The BSAP reading room received the following books and journals/periodicals during January-March 2003.

Books

1. Mookherjee, Kushal (1995): Birds and Trees of Tolly. Tollygunge Club Ltd., Calcutta. [Donated by T. Vijayendra.]
2. Neeti Samakhya (2003): Let the Water Flow. A Background for Citizens on Water Issues in Andhra Pradesh. Manchi Pustakam, Secunderabad. [Donated by T. Vijayendra.]
3. Sibley, David Allen (2002): Sibley's Birding Basics. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. [Donated by Tom C. Hash.]

4. Singh, Jagjit (2001): Birds of India. Books Today, New Delhi. 1st reprint. [Donated by T. Vijayendra.]
5. Singh, Shyam (1999): Birds of Bharatpur. Checklist. Disha Bodh Publication, Bharatpur. [Donated by T. Vijayendra.]

Journals / Periodicals

1. Newsletter for Birdwatchers. 21 miscellaneous issues from 1969-1986. [Donated by Zafar Futehally.]
2. Jatayu. A newsletter of the project: Conservation of Critically Endangered Gyps Species of Vultures in India. Vol. 1. 2001-2002. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.]
3. Samsad News. The Prakriti Samsad Monthly Newsletter Vol. 21. No. 1. [Exchange.]
4. Birds. Vol. 19. No. 5. Spring 2003. [Exchange.]
5. Mistnet. Vol. 3. No. 4. October-December 2002 (Received on 24.2.2003).
6. Tigerlink News. Vol. 9. No. 1. February 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.]
7. Suara Enggang. No. 1. January-February 2003. [Exchange.]
8. Samsad News. Vol. 12. No. 2. February 2003. [Exchange.]

STUDIES IN VULTURE POPULATION DECLINE

Dr. Vibhu Prakash of the B.N.H.S. has been studying the declining populations of Vultures for the past two years to try and identify the cause of the vulture declines and potential remedial measures. In order to carry out the necessary investigations, it is vitally important that freshly-dead vultures are available for detailed post-mortem examination and sampling for diagnostic tests. Therefore biologists are encouraged to inform Dr. Vibhu Prakash of any sick vultures in their area and to collect any freshly dead vultures that may be found. If they are to be useful for examination, the carcasses must be fresh, and kept that way, until the time of examination. If such are found, immediately contact Dr. Vibhu Prakash (BNHS – Pinjore 0171-25264426) or Dr. Ghalsasi (PDRC – Pune 26913315/26913416) to arrange for the carcass to be sent by the fastest way possible to the PDRC laboratory in Pune.

STOP PRESS - VULTURE NEST FOUND

One of the BSAP members (H. Taher) on a casual trip to the Ramoji Film City on the Vijayawada Highway, discovered a nest of a Whitebacked Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) on an electricity pylon. When first seen at around 10:15 a.m. both birds were on the nest. A second sighting at around 12:45 showed only one bird on the nest, apparently incubating. This is a tremendous and very significant and interesting discovery. We intend to keep a close eye on the nesting activities of the birds.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '**' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hyderabad city (Pranay Rao)

20.xii.2002: GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE Bought from bird market & released at Ravirala (Rangareddi District); GREEN MUNIA M, bought from bird market & sent to Adilabad District for release. They were attempting to make N.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Bailpadu (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu)

10.iii: LESSER FLORICAN 1F; SHORT-EARED OWL 2.

Cherukucherla village (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu)

11.i: BAR-HEADED GOOSE 110.

Parumanchala Cheruvu

11.i (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu): BAR-HEADED GOOSE 500+; DEMOISELLE CRANE 4,000+.

4.iii (K. Thulsi Rao & M. Maqsood Javed): BAR-HEADED GOOSE 600; DEMOISELLE CRANE 800.

12.iii (K. Thulsi Rao & M. Maqsood Javed): PAINTED STORK NT* 100+.

Talamudipi Tank (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu)

11.i: BLACK STORK.

Tikkasubbaiah Bavi (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu)

11.i: GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK 1,000+.

8.iii: COMMON KESTREL 1 M carrying a dead Common Babbler.

Vipnagandla (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu)

12.i: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 2M.

9.iii: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 2M, 1F.

10.iii: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 2M.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Ameenapur Tank (S. Ashok Kumar)

10.i: SPOT-BILLED DUCK 230; NORTHERN PINTAIL 800+; RED-CRESTED POCHARD 98; COMMON POCHARD 360; TUFTED POCHARD 28.

Anantgiri (Kiran Katikaneni, Zubin Sagar, Nikhil Narayanaswamy)

6.iv: CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE PRB, in N, probably brooding or shielding an eaglet from the sun. Couldn't be ascertained even after a 2-hour observation.

Eerlakunta (Madinaguda village) (S. Ashok Kumar)

28.i: LITTLE GREBE POB, 23 with 10 yng.

Gangavaram Cheruvu (S. Ashok Kumar)

20.i: RED-CRESTED POCHARD 250+; COMMON COOT 1500+, POB, imm., present.

Nalla Cheruvu (S. Ashok Kumar)

19.i: NORTHERN SHOVELLER 2000+.

Ravirala (Hyder Jaffer & Pranay Rao)

16.xii.2002: PAINTED STORK NT* 52.

25.xii.2002: EURASIAN SPOONBILL 10; MALLARD 5.

VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Tyda (Bhargavi Srinivasulu & C. Srinivasulu)

14-16.iii: CRESTED GOSHAWK M.

MAHARASHTRA

CHANDRAPUR DISTRICT

Tadoba Tiger Reserve (S. Ashok Kumar)

8.ii: EUROPEAN WHITE STORK; GREATER GREY-HEADED FISH-EAGLE NT

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST

The latest issue of Pitta lists *Phylloscopus inornatus humie* as one of the birds in the BSAP camp list. *Phylloscopus humie* has now been designated with full species status.

Best Wishes, Nitin Jamdar

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Siraj A. Taher (55612608), Humayun Taher (55612608) & Raajeev Mathews (23310721)

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IPBTTA



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 146: June 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098) or Siraj Taher (6612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 22-vi-2003: Sanjivayya Park, Hyderabad District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am. Sightings can include garden birds and perhaps some resident ducks on the lake. There could also be some Wagtails around. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (6612608) or Shafaat Ulla (3353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

Monday, 16-vi-2003: Indoor Meeting, Wildlife Quiz Programme by J.V.D. Moorthy: Vidyaranya High School, opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings of the Society, Field Trip to Nehru Zoological Park - 18th May 2003 By Humayun Taher

The members who braved the heat wave and turned up for the field meet at the Zoo were reasonably well-rewarded. It turned out to be a quite interesting trip.

There was a bit of an initial hitch because the security guard had not been given proper instructions about the Society trip timings and we were expected, not at 7 a.m. but at 9.30 a.m. However, once inside, the spirits revived and birds began to appear.

Foremost of these was the Whitebreasted Kingfisher. His iridescent blue, white and brown plumage commands attention. He was matched only by the snowy white plumes of the breeding plumage of the Little Egret. One wonders why the fish don't jump for the white tufts hanging pendant from the breast of the cock Little Egret. Or maybe they do - to their misfortune and the Egret's gain!

The group reached the lake opposite to the Lion Safari entrance. This is always a good place. It ran true to form - providing such interesting sightings as a flotilla of Spotbills, a few Lesser Whistling Teal and sundry Cormorants and Night Herons. Kiran noticed Darters amongst some Large Cormorants and a couple of Purple Herons skulking in the reeds. Shafaat Saab noticed a couple of very brilliantly plumaged wading birds and these were identified as Painted Snipe. Regardless of the fact

that they were in plain view, the birds just sat there and seemed oblivious to the by now highly excited crowd of birdwatchers on the shore. A small heron-like bird seemed more retiring and did a quick back flip into the shelter of the long reeds - probably a bittern but not a proper sighting to distinguish the species. Grr! Birding can be very frustrating at times. Kiran, who was very keen to spot a bittern, will testify to that!

Kullu (Kulkarni) noticed that the large trees opposite the lake held a sizeable population of Grey Herons and Large Egrets. It looked rather like a heronry in the making. Some of the Grey Herons were immature birds - so it seems likely that they are building somewhere in the vicinity. Under the heron trees sat a small herd of Chital and, as we looked, a covey of peafowl - a cock and four hens - appeared, stared at the Chital, the herons and us, and promptly vanished as quickly as they had appeared.

Where there is water, there will be found Redwattled Lapwings. The Zoo lake had plenty of water and a corresponding number of Lapwings. Also a small flock of Blackwinged Stilts interspersed with a couple of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, some Indian Moorhens and a couple of Purple Moorhens. Just as we decided that perhaps we should push along, the resident pair of Pied Kingfishers appeared, hovering over the water, looking hopefully for fish or frogs. Or maybe they enjoy the plunge into cool water during the summer, just like any of us!

Carrying on, we saw their little cousin, the Small Blue Kingfisher at its usual spot just beside the entrance to the Lion Safari Park, staring into the muddy waters of the moat, looking hopefully for his breakfast. A very perky

little chap, this – and always looking so cheerful and trilling away happily. An interesting study this! Suddenly everyone had forgotten the Kingfisher – Kullu has spotted something! Surely that is a Small Greenbilled Malkoha! Yes, indeed. Very interesting, and so elegant-looking too. Humayun marvels at the blue skin surrounding the eyes. Ashok Kumar looks at the bird, then at the field guide illustration and decides that the field guide comes a very poor second! Now we know why a bird in the hand... etc!

Moving along, we come to the bear enclosure where three young "Bhaloo's" are capering about and obviously enjoying themselves hugely. How do they survive in those heavy fur coats – one would have expected them to melt! But they don't, and it takes very little imagination to see that they are having a wonderful time, particularly if they manage to find a juicy grub or beetle. We watch them at their game for some little time, looking out meanwhile for the Nightjar which is occasionally seen on the trees in their enclosure. He is not there – perhaps it found the bears too boisterous for its taste and shifted residence to some more sedate neighbourhood.

A small pond in the enclosure of the Indian Wild Ass brings a hen Shikra down for a drink. Also at the pond is another Malkoha. Kullu spots this one again. They seem to like him – is it because he can imitate their calls with great accuracy? The Black Drongo doesn't agree – he can do it too, and they don't show themselves to him! Sitting nearby, the Drongo voices its disapproval. It can very

cleverly imitate the Shikra too. Humayun is almost fooled by this. The plan only failed because the Drongo didn't quite know when to stop. He went on calling and so was caught! A wonderful mimic, this chap, but nobody can accurately mimic the Goldenbacked Woodpecker – either with his loud, strident chattering call or his energetic tapping of the rotten tree trunk, under which he is convinced there is a succulent grub, earmarked for a welcome snack.

The word snack prompts us to thoughts of food – time to go. It has been a good trip with a total of about 40 species.

Quite good, considering it is only 10:30 a.m.! But the day is getting uncomfortably hot and perhaps it is time to go.

A good day's birding, and very enjoyable. We all had a good time. As for the birds, well...

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS

The Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh wishes to thank Mr. Rishad Naoraji, one of our very distinguished Life Members for his generous donation of Rs. 30,000/=. He has also made a promise to give a donation of Rs. 10,000/= every year from the next year onwards. It is sincerely expected that the Society will rise to the occasion and utilize these donations thoughtfully and judiciously for the cause of Bird Conservation as per the wishes of the donor.

BIRDWORD PUZZLE - No. 2

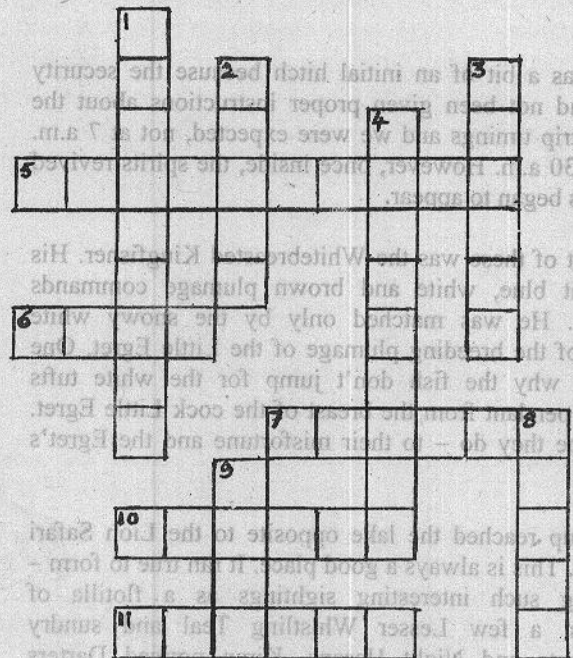
By M.M. Ali Khan

Note: Figures in Brackets denote number of alphabets

The puzzle contains bird names only

Correct solution to this puzzle will be given in the next issue of PITTA

1. Mean of Black and White before hero neatly gets it. (9)
2. Weight-lifter. (5)
3. RED RAT changes. (6)
4. Moves earth with a spade. (9)
5. Travel by air with a fielder. (10)
6. See 8
- 7 & 11. Our native road maker. (6, 6)
- 8 & 6. RENT changed on flowing water. (5, 4)
9. See 10.
- 10 & 9. Makes clothes for all. (6, 4)

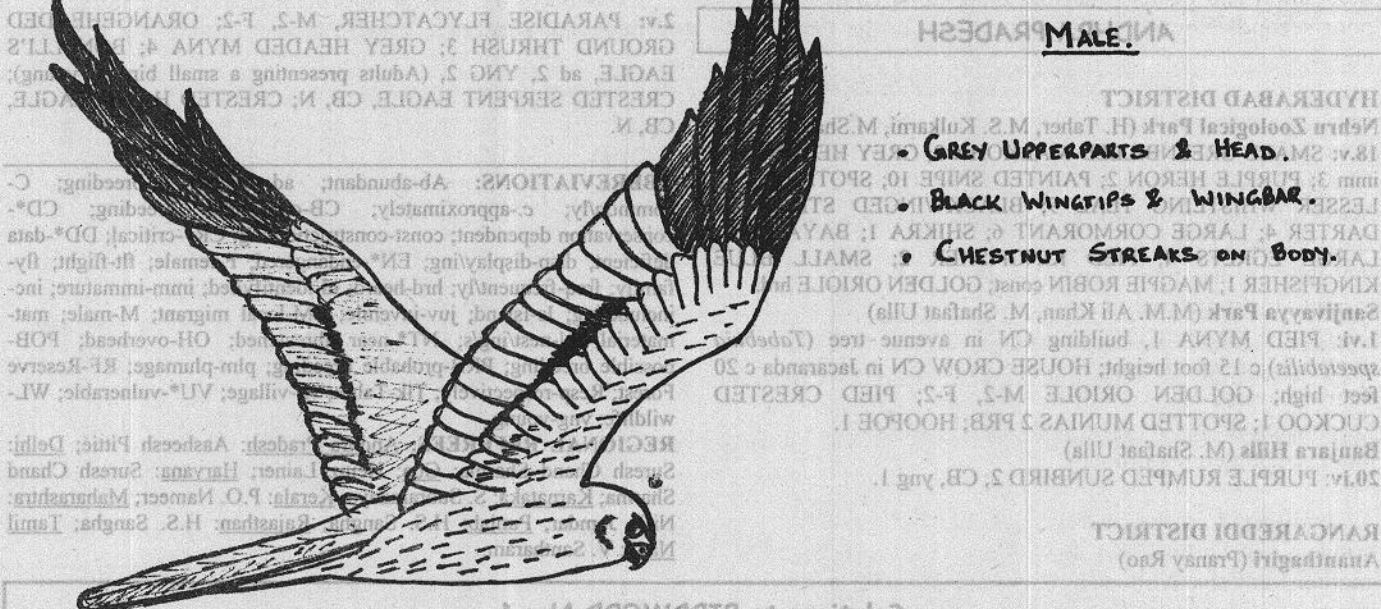


Members are requested to send their solutions to PITTA at the Society address. The correct entries will be entered for a draw. The lucky winner receives a BSAP cap, donated by Mr. M.M. Ali Khan

FIELD CRAFT - by Humayun Taher

Circus Pygargus - MONTAGU'S HARRIER

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from authors, field notes, and other sources, on interesting and significant birds of the Indian subcontinent. The notes are published in the order received, and the selection of preceding criteria is left to the discretion of the editor. The notes are published in the order received, and the selection of preceding criteria is left to the discretion of the editor. The notes are published in the order received, and the selection of preceding criteria is left to the discretion of the editor.

**MALE.**

- GREY UPPERPARTS & HEAD.
- BLACK WINGTIPS & WINGBAR.
- CHESTNUT STREAKS ON BODY.

Solutions to BIRDWORD No. 1

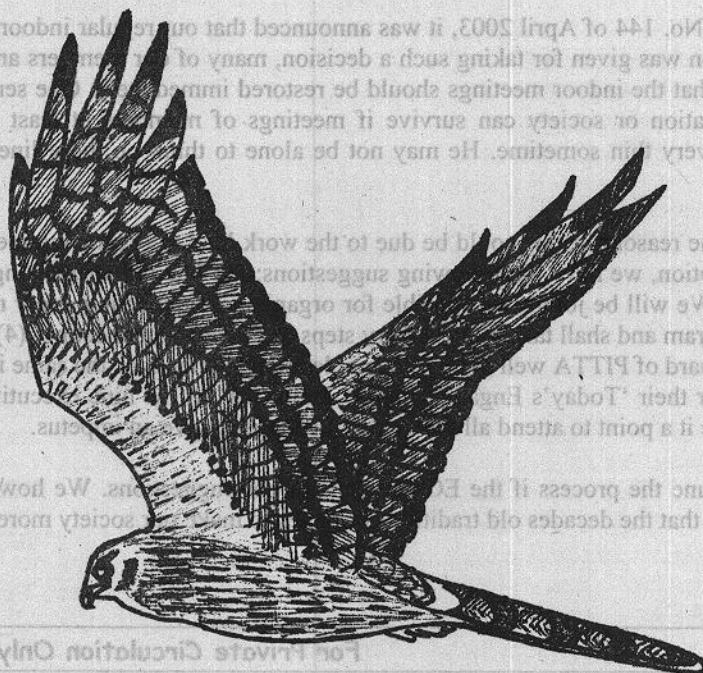
1 = Sandpiper; 2 = Plover; 3 & 7 = Whitecollared Kingfisher; 4 = Coppermith; 5 = Wren Warbler; 6 = Ring Dove; 8 = Nightjar; 9 & 11 = Wren; 10 & 12 = Large Grey Babbler

PIGEON POST

In our PITTA No. 144 of April 2003, it was announced that our regular indoor meetings were being discontinued henceforth. Since no reason was given for taking such a decision, many of our members are sorely disappointed and have expressed their strong desire that the indoor meetings should be restored immediately. A senior member is so upset that he went on to say that no association or society can survive if meetings of its members are not organized once a month are not organized, even if the attendance is very low sometimes. He may not be alone to feel this way and we feel many others would feel the same.

FEMALE.

- BROWN PLUMAGE.
- THIN WHITE RUMP.
- HEAD LIGHTER THAN BODY.
- BARS ON WING TOUCH BODY.
- WHITE TAIL TIP.



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 Editors: Siraj A. Taher, Humayun Taher (50012608), Rajeev Mathews (23310721) Website: <http://www.bsponline.org> E-mail: esashresh@vsnl.in, humayun@rediffmail.com
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BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '**' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Nehru Zoological Park (H. Taher, M.S. Kulkarni, M. Shafaat Ulla)

18.v: SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 2; GREY HERON ad 8, imm 3; PURPLE HERON 2; PAINTED SNIPE 10; SPOTBILLS 30; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 9; BLACKWINGED STILTS 20; DARTER 4; LARGE CORMORANT 6; SHIKRA 1; BAYA const.; LARGE EGRETS 4; PIED KINGFISHER 2; SMALL BLUE KINGFISHER 1; MAGPIE ROBIN const; GOLDEN ORIOLE hrd.

Sanjivayya Park (M.M. Ali Khan, M. Shafaat Ulla)

1.vi: PIED MYNA 1, building CN in avenue tree (*Tabebuia spectabilis*) c 15 foot height; HOUSE CROW CN in Jacaranda c 20 feet high; GOLDEN ORIOLE M-2, F-2; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; SPOTTED MUNIAS 2 PRB; HOPOE 1.

Banjara Hills (M. Shafaat Ulla)

20.iv: PURPLE RUMPED SUNBIRD 2, CB, yng 1.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Ananthagiri (Pranay Rao)

2.v: PARADISE FLYCATCHER, M-2, F-2; ORANGEHEADED GROUND THRUSH 3; GREY HEADED MYNA 4; BONELLI'S EAGLE, ad 2, YNG 2, (Adults presenting a small bird to young); CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE, CB, N; CRESTED HAWK EAGLE, CB, N.

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We feel that the reason for this could be due to the work load in organizing meetings for which there may not be time. Based on this assumption, we have the following suggestions: (1) The indoor meetings every third Monday of the month should be restarted; (2) We will be jointly responsible for organizing the meeting every month; (3) We shall select the topic/speaker or any other program and shall take all necessary steps to organise the meeting; (4) The details of the programme will be given to the editorial board of PITTA well in time to enable them to announce the same in PITTA; (5) A notice will also be given to the newspapers for their 'Today's Engagements' column; (6) All the nine executive committee members should set an example and must make it a point to attend all the indoor meetings to give an impetus.

We can fine tune the process if the EC agrees with our suggestions. We however, request the EC members to give further suggestions so that the decades old tradition continues to make our society more visible and strong.

S. Ashok Kumar
M. Shafaat Ulla

For Private Circulation Only

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Published 8/7/2003

Indexed

IPITTA



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No. 147: July 2003

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PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 27-vii-2003: Chilkur Deer Park, Rangareddi District: Route: Mehdiapatnam - Artillery Centre Golkonda - on Vikarabad road. Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.00am. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 21-vii-2003, 6pm: Talk and discussion on members' visit to Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary, by Mr. S. Ashok Kumar, Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

EDITORIAL

Two developments that occurred in May and June this year auger well for the Society. Sometimes shock therapy wakes up people as nothing else can. Well, this time it happened to the BSAP. The announcement of discontinuation of the monthly Indoor Meetings, owing to poor attendance jolted the members. There was a plethora of comments like "How sad, at least once a month we used to meet - now we cannot do that - how sad" from a very enthusiastic and regular lady member of long standing. While one member was unhappy that instead of "putting our heads together and finding a solution, we have resorted to the 'easy way out'", another was angry - "A thin bulletin (PITTA) once a month and a journal (MAYURA) once a year is not what I would like". Some took it in their stride, but two members came forward and took up the challenge, promising to do their best to put the Indoor Meetings back on the BSAP calendar of events.

The other was the way people rose to meet the challenge of the financial problems that the Society was facing. While there was a generous donation from one member, BSAP received a welcome increase in the corporate membership. In fact, it went up 20 times! The Singareni Collieries Education Society has made 17 schools and 2 colleges under them as our corporate members. The Singareni Collieries Company Ltd. (SCCL) has drawn up a plan to tie up with BSAP to impart education in nature and environmental studies to these schools. Now it is up to us to rise to the occasion and do the best that is required to educate these young people to the best of our knowledge, experience and ability. How we can do it would justify the confidence and expectations that the SCCL has placed on us.

NOTES & NEWS

HAPPENINGS OF THE SOCIETY - FIELD TRIP TO SANJIVAYYA PARK 22-06-2003

By Humayun Taher

The first cool bite of the monsoon was in the air when the members of the Birdwatchers Society of A.P. gathered at Sanjivayya Park on the morning of 22 June for the field trip. It turned out to be a fairly good one.

To start with, activity was low. The most conspicuous birds were the ubiquitous House Crows (*Corvus splendens*). They were in full breeding frenzy all over the park and we counted over 15 active nests. Naturally, all these nests were attractive bait for the Koels (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), which are brood

parasitic on the Crows. At several places, we observed crows chasing the koels, not without reason, I may add.

Continuing along the path, we notched up a few Coots (*Fulica atra*) and Dabchicks (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) on the margins of the Hussain Sagar Lake. Also noticed were a few Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), sitting on the rocks in the water and sunning themselves. They seemed to be enjoying the warmth of the sun. No doubt they found the water a trifle too cold for their liking, augmented as it was with the monsoon showers.

In the park itself, a few Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) attracted attention by chittering around us. And then the first Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) appeared! What

a dazzling sight. A pair, too! Wonderful. Who can fail to be captivated by this brilliantly plumaged bird! Certainly not Shobha, who was most eager to see an Oriole. The bird obliged. In fact, it was rather too obliging and appeared here and there throughout the duration of the birding trip through the park. At one point, we even found its rather neat little home in a Ficus tree, with the hen bird sitting. The cock bird relieved her occasionally, but her idea of relief was confined to a brief aerial sortie, a hasty snack and then return to the domestic chores! A model housewife, this one!

Further up, we encountered the bird we had all come to see! A nesting pair of Pied Mynas (*Sturnus contra*). Now, Pied Mynas were previously not reported from the Hyderabad environs so, when two of our members had reported the sighting on the 1st of this month, from Sanjivayya Park; it was cause for celebration. And now, with a whole crowd of birdwatchers gaping up at them, the pair of birds were seen building their nest. It was not complete and the birds were constantly making trips to the nest with twigs, bits of grass and other odds and ends in their beaks. They were also not very shy and were obviously not greatly disturbed by the motley crowd of birders under their nest tree. Having taken a long and very satisfying look at the busy birds, we continued.

Black Drongos (*Dicrurus adsimilis*) are known for their extreme boldness in the vicinity of their nest. So when we saw one chasing a crow, we were on the alert. It wasn't long before Aasheesh saw the neat little nest, with the bird incubating. Nearby, a Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) had also built, and was also incubating. Obviously, it meant to profit from the boldness of the Drongo and its ability to keep the crows away! Ashy Wren Warblers (*Prinia socialis*) were also sporting in the bushes nearby, but were far more careful as to the guarding of their nest and we were unable to see one. Doubtless, it is there; but the birds kept their secret well!

Humayun and Nandu, walking ahead, observed a second pair of Pied Mynas, collecting nesting material on the lawns and conveying it to a Ficus tree nearby. Sure enough, a look through the binoculars revealed a second nest in the making. Here was a gold mine indeed! We had come prepared to see one nest – but a second nest – in the same area! Surely this means that there is a colony in the making. But some worrying thoughts occur at this point – where have the birds shifted from? And why? Are they 'escaped' birds? There is material here for some research on these birds. Anyone out there interested?

On the tree that the Mynas had selected as appropriate for the rearing of their own olive branches, a perky little black and white bird was playing hide-and-seek. No trouble identifying this chap – a male Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*)! On the topmost twig, a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) hammered away on its anvil and a couple of Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*) also put in an appearance on the trees nearby. Their crests look so comical at the moment of take-off and landing, fully spread out and resembling a rather untidily combed wig, falling forward from the wearer's face. . .!

On the Hussain Sagar Lake, a flat rock in the water revealed a couple of Indian River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*). A couple of metal structures on the lake had been appropriated by Cormorants which sat very contentedly on these poles. In the park itself, Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) now appeared, vying with their cousins for our attentions. They were almost successful; only the appearance of the Goldmantled Chloropsis (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*) defeated them. Ali Saab noticed the bird sitting quietly in the midst of a leafy bougainvillea creeper and the birders flocked around. Rather surprisingly, the bird was most accommodating and just sat there staring at the group with a puzzled look. The splash of purple at the base of the bill looks so wonderful. And surely that green colour would put many a tree to shame!

But now, time is getting on and the day starts to hot up. Someone up there forgot that summer is supposed to be over! We decide to beat a retreat before the Sanjivayya Park canteen decides to serve up fried bird(watchers) for breakfast to anyone interested. En-route a hen Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) decides to show us how she catches squirrels. The only one who does not appreciate the demonstration is the squirrel, and who can blame him! His life is hard enough as it is, without having beastly great hawks stooping at him at every turn. A shrill scream and the squirrel shows us how it escapes from hawks! A moment later, the hawk has disappeared and the squirrel has found something interesting for his nervous stomach!

Meanwhile, the birdwatchers retreat from the scene. The trip revealed 34 species of birds including such interesting ones as the Pied Mynas and the Chloropsis. Altogether a good time, enjoyed by the adults as well as the troop of most enthusiastic youngsters.

Workshop on Building Environment and Forest Protection Programmes

The Singareni Collieries Company Ltd. (SCCL), Khammam District, A.P. organised a half-day workshop in Singareni Bhavan Hyderabad, at 11.00 a.m. on May 24th 2003. The BSAP was invited to participate in this workshop along with the A.P. Forest Department (APFD) and World Wide Fund for Nature – India (WWF), A.P. State office. The objective of this workshop was to obtain inputs from the A.P. State Government (through the A.P. Forest Dept.) and Non-Governmental organisations. Very meaningful and vigorous discussions took place between all the participants on how best to go about achieving the goals envisaged by the SCCL. Some decisions were taken and guidelines put forward, by the APFD, WWF-India and BSAP on the priorities and procedures to be adopted. The Chairman and Managing Director of the SCCL, both in his opening address and concluding remarks was very keen to go ahead upon the programmes agreed upon and assured everyone of all help that may be required. Society members Siraj Taher, S. Ashok Kumar, M. Shafaat Ulla, A.A. Aziz and Kumari Padmaja participated in the workshop and took part in the deliberations.

Books & Journals received

The BSAP reading room received the following books and journals/periodicals during March-June 2003.

Books

1. Khan, M.G. Ali (No date): A Vet in Wilderness. [Complimentary.].
2. The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 as Amended by the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002. Professional Book Publishers, New Delhi. [Donated by Belinda Wright.].
3. Javed, Salim & Rahul Kaul (2003): Field Methods for Bird Surveys. Bombay Natural History Society. [Donated by I.B.C.N., B.N.H.S.].

Journals / Periodicals

1. *BirdLife Asia*. Vol. 1. No. 1. December 2002 [Complimentary.].
2. *Birdwatcher's Digest*. Special optics issue. Vol. 25. No. 4. March/April 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
3. *Hornbill*. January-March 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
4. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. Vol. 99. No. 3. 28 February 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
5. *Samsad News*. Vol. 21. No. 3. March 2003. [Exchange.].
6. *Vihang*. Summer 2003. [Exchange.].
7. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 11. Nos. 24, 25, 26. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
8. *Suara Enggang*. 2003. No. 2. March-April. [Exchange.].
9. *Suara Enggang*. 2003. No. 3. May-June. [Exchange.].
10. *World Birdwatch*. Vol. 25. No. 2. June 2003. [Exchange.].

A MEMORABLE BIRD QUIZ

By M. Shobha

The pleasant prospect of taking a winged wildlife quiz brought 16 BSAP enthusiasts together on 16 June 2003. Our Quiz Master, Mr. Moorthy, came well prepared with question cards for different categories: starters, teasers, stunners, the gamut. And what a commendable range they turned out to be, from English poetry to mythology, from philately to etymology. Mr. Moorthy was obviously in his element, as it should be with twenty years of birding under his hat (*a la* his poser to us, "the female of the Pheasant-tailed Jacana species incubates its eggs ...," you guessed it, under its wings!).

And so we focussed our attention on our feathered friends. What is a gizzard? A crop? What is the name of the voice box of birds? What does the term 'ridiculous' describe? According to Mr. Salim Ali, which bird mimics the human voice closest? When does the Black Eagle breed? What is guano? Which bird finds and visits water with astounding accuracy on land?

What makes Guillemots unique among sea birds? (You simply must allow me to let on here that the colour of every clutch of eggs differs from all others, making it easier for the parent Guillemot to identify its nest from amongst a sea of nests). And staying with sea birds, what do baby Herring Gulls have to do to be fed? They have to work on the parent, er ..., tap on the red spots on the sides of the parent's beak! Talking of babies, what is a baby eagle called? 'Aiglet' says our German-speaking Quizzer. 'Eaglet' says French-speaking Kiran. A 'toffee!' – 'no, coffee!' sort of etymological tiff there, what say you? Alcyon is the Greek root for which one of our common birds? Tiercel is Latin for the male Peregrine Falcon, being derived from 'tiertium' meaning 'one-third.' What is so significant about this name? The Tiercel is befittingly named, as it is one-third the size of the female Peregrine Falcon! (*Editor's Note: The Tiercel Peregrine is a third smaller than the female, and not one-third the size.*) What is a 'Lek?' 'Lek' is Scandinavian for 'play' and refers to the display ground for birds in courting time, in case you did not know. 'Aves' is Latin for 'birds'; how does the legend go? It was a firm belief in times gone by that human beings, upon death, turned into birds. The Owl belongs to the order Strigiformes and family Strigidae. Do you know why? Striges is Latin and the plural form of 'Strix' meaning 'witch.' Surely it's the bewitching eyes of the Owl that earned it its unsavoury classification! As if to make up for this misnomer, we have given it the name of not one but two Gods: 'Athena Brahma' aka Owl. Which bird is the symbol of the Aztecs? The Owl. Edward Lear immortalized a bird in his nonsense verse "... and the Pussycat went to sea/ In a beautiful pea-green boat." Which bird was it? The Owl again! Who acts as the messenger of Yama? It's the Owl once more. King Solomon, who spoke the language of the birds and beasts alike, and Queen Balkys of Sheba, also chose a bird to be their go-between messenger. Ah-ha, got you there! It is not the Owl this time, but the remarkable Hoopoe.

If bird-dog training goes against your grain, perhaps you would know which species of bird makes for a good, for lack of a better word, watchdog? The Geese – they have a keen sense of hearing and what's more, show aggression by nipping the intruder! Which birds were depicted in the engravings of the Temples of Egypt? The Egyptian Vulture and Pharaoh's Chicken. And which bird is a symbol of 'parental love?' The Indian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*). The Griffon Vulture, also known as Nekhbet, was the guardian of the King of Egypt. What is the national bird of Guatemala? The Quetzal. Guatemalans chose to name their currency too after this beautiful bird. On the other hand, Liberia issued a stamp in 1920-21, of a 'national bird' that did not belong to Africa, leave alone Liberia. Which one, do you ask? The Great Indian Hornbill!

Pigeons produce crop milk, as do two other species of birds. Which ones? The flabbergasting answer is Flamingoes and Penguins. Painted Storks spread their wings out wide to protect their young from the sun/ What else do they do to care for their little ones? They dribble water down their beaks to quench the thirst of their young.

How many eggs of a hen would equal the size of one egg of an Ostrich? Two dozen. Really.

Which bird do the Vedas refer to as "one reared by others?" The Koel. And who plays the Koel's host? The Crow. What is a group of sparrows called? A host of sparrows. A flock of Jays? A party of Jays. A flock of finches? A charm of finches. A flock of Larks? An exaltation of Larks. What better way to round off this report of the quiz, than to hark back to the only question yours truly was able to answer –

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote in high praise of which bird in this famous quote from his poem:

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert
That from heaven or near it
Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

... "To A Skylark"

BIRDWORD PUZZLE - No. 3

By M.M. Ali Khan

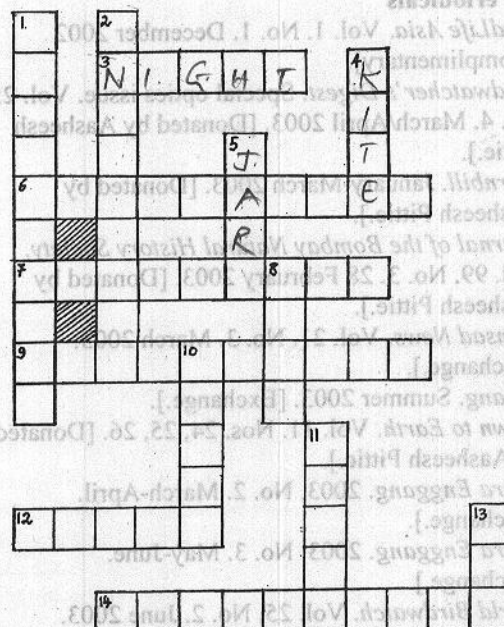
Note: Figures in Brackets denote number of alphabets

The puzzle contains bird names only

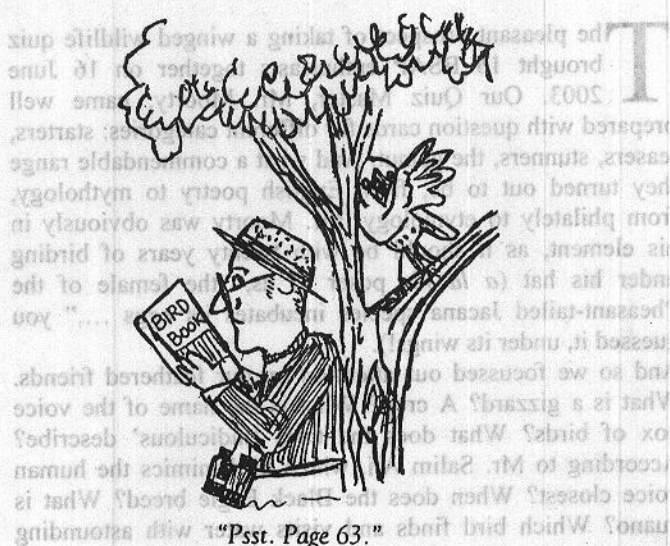
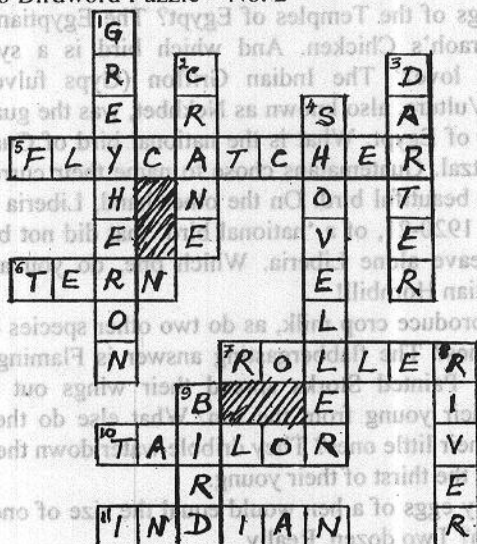
Correct solution to this puzzle will be given in the next issue of PITTA

1. Healthy man of the collar (10)
2. See 10
- 3 & 13. Vase after sunset (5, 3)
4. One may fly it on a string (4)
5. Go to New Zealand to get y our shoe-shine (4)
6. TRIED to GRASP to get a runner (10)
7. Hamelin man on the beach (4, 5)
- 8 & 11. Coconut tree that is fast (4, 5)
- 9 & 12. Baby might fall if she is not careful (4+6, 5)
- 10, 2 & 14. Tiger coloured pest slip-fielder (5, 3+5, 10)

Members are requested to send their solutions to PITTA at the Society address. The correct entries will be entered for a draw. The lucky winner receives a BSAP cap, donated by Mr. M.M. Ali Khan.



Solution to Birdword Puzzle - No. 2



"Psst. Page 63."

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST — 62

“3. HABITAT SURVEYS

“Although information is needed on all kinds of habitats, one should, in selecting a habitat for survey, choose one that can be covered adequately with the resources at one’s command. A patch of jungle may appeal as containing more kinds of birds than are found among paddy-fields, and therefore being on the face of it more interesting, but it is infinitely more difficult to survey it adequately. Until one has worked out one’s own technique on easier habitats it is wiser not to attempt a comprehensive survey of so difficult a subject as jungle or scrub if one is aiming at detail and accuracy, as the results will probably be neither accurate nor complete and may well be misleading.

It is advisable to select a habitat that is characteristic of other districts as well, so that it may be used for comparative work later on, though surveys of isolated and non-recurring habitats are still valuable in view of the paucity of records so far collected, particularly if it is one which is likely to disappear eventually. Another point to bear in mind is that what are natural boundaries to us may well be ‘highways’ or gathering points for the birds we wish to study. A hedge or a continuous line of bushes may be a serious obstacle for man (and therefore a convenient boundary to his activities) unless there are gaps through which he can pass, but it is likely to be the headquarters of many birds.

The type of habitat to survey must inevitably depend to a great extent on one’s resources and qualifications and objects. If one is working with other specialists as a team with the object of undertaking an intensive and exact study of the structure of a community, one must of necessity choose a somewhat limited area. On the other hand, if one is working entirely alone and one’s opportunities for field work are restricted or irregular, it is probably wise to limit one’s object to compiling a comprehensive list of all the birds seen in the district. In this case a larger area can be covered, but one should be prepared to sub-divide it into its component minor habitats and try to disentangle the real use to which each one is put by the birds seen there. If one moves about the country from time to time similar methods can be applied to each place visited and interesting comparisons can later be made between the various habitats covered. It is useful when doing this to work out a formula or ‘pro-forma’ for the form and order in which one’s reports are to be couched, as this facilitates comparisons later on.”

“In studying any particular habitat the first thing to be done is to describe it fully and accurately, and in this it is a great advantage if the help of a competent botanist can be enlisted to describe the vegetation, an entomologist to deal with the insects, and of other specialists to cover such matters as the local climatic conditions, the fauna, and the soil and geology. A team of observers, each one competent in his own particular field, is ideal for any habitat survey, and the combined knowledge of such observers as are available may be sufficient to bridge the gap left by the absence of, say, a geologist. Even so, a lot of useful work can be done by one man working on his own, provided he is observant, accurate and knows his own limitations.

Many features in each habitat change during the course of a year and full records should, of course, be kept of these as they may well affect the bird life. Plants come into flower and fruit, the leaves of some of them fall leaving the branches bare and a carpet of dead leaves on the ground beneath, which provides cover for insects; paddy is planted, flooded and harvested and all these changes may in some way or other influence the use to which the birds put the jungle or the paddy-fields. The meteorological records should include temperatures, rainfall, humidity, wind, cloud and so on in order to provide a comprehensive record of the weather experienced during the survey period. Some animals are known to be seen more often in a dry season, some plants thrive and fruit better in a wet one, but we know little of the limits within which dryness and wetness are effective.

The natural complement to a full description of a survey area is a map or plan of it. More often than not it is necessary to prepare one’s own sketch plan and this should be large enough to show all the important features clearly. If the survey area comprises more than one kind of minor habitat, these should shown on the plan by means of different kinds of shading or hatching, or better still by the use of different coloured inks.”

“Before embarking on any survey it is a good plan to formulate certain guiding ‘rules’. Are you, for instance, going to include birds seen only flying over, and if so how are you going to refer to them in your notes and in your final report? How do you propose to deal with mixed hunting parties, which are only passing casually through the survey area? Are you going to attempt periodic counts of numbers? If so, they will require a special set of rules of their own. The making of censuses is outside the scope of this paper and anyone interested is advised to look up the reports of past censuses. Decide on these points before starting on the actual survey, so that your records may be consistent throughout.

Having selected the survey area, made a sketch plan of it, and written down a full description of the habitat, one can then begin a survey of the birds. If one is aiming at great exactitude and a detailed result, the area should be inspected at frequent intervals preferably every day, and as far as possible one’s visits should take place at the same time or times each day. This is not always possible, nor is it always essential if one is aiming only at a more general result. A small note-book should always be carried in the field and the observations entered in this during or immediately after the visit to the survey area; memory dulls one’s observations very quickly and accuracy may often be lost in a matter of an hour.”

“Whatever methods used to keep records of the survey, it is important to evaluate one’s observations in order to avoid giving a distorted impression to others. If one is absolutely not certain of the identity of a bird seen it is essential that this be made clear in the records. There are many occasions on which even the most experienced ornithologist is not absolutely certain beyond all doubt of the identity of the bird he has seen, and there is nothing to be ashamed of in confessing one’s uncertainty...”

“The records should always include a note of the time and conditions under which they were made, and of all incidental matters which might affect either the birds themselves or the validity of the record. Observations with the naked eye from a moving train or car are obviously more open to mistake and inexactitude than observations made with field glasses at only a few yards range...”

[M.D. Lister, 1951, “Birds and Ecology,” *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 50: 150-154.]

Before I comment a little more on ‘habitat surveys’ I must inform readers about an important modification of the map of biogeographical areas I provided in my last Letter # 61 (Pitta 145, May. 2003). Please note that the Kathiawar peninsula (or what is termed “Saurashtra”) and the mainland portion of Gujarat State, which I call “Guzerat” (from Surat north to Ahmadabad and then to Palanpur and Deesa), to its east, actually forms part of the Central Highlands biogeographical area (with 635 recorded species of birds) and not of the Indus Plain as depicted inaccurately on my map. Only the Cutch portion of Gujarat is part of the Indus Plain biogeographical area (with 591 recorded species).

Lister's suggestions quoted above on the methods to be employed while making bird surveys need your careful study. First classify the 'habitat' you decide to survey (suited to your time constraints), using the five major 'Groups' I documented in my last Letter with their sub-divisions. I also recommend selecting the 1st quadrants where you normally reside (or often travel to) as the 100 sq. km area you could concentrate on until you move elsewhere, if at all. Each such quadrant will have several distinct habitat sub-divisions (unless it is total desert) and offer each bird watcher plenty to do in varied ecosystems, even if limited in area. For those of you residing in the Hyderabad—Secunderabad twin-town metropolis, I had already given the basic information on this quadrant in my Letter # 56 (Pitta 139, November 2002). Instead of doing the same KBR National Park, Patancheru ICRISAT Campus, Nehru Zoological Park, etc., time and again, why don't BSAP "Field Outing" organizers check out a relief-cum-vegetation map of the Hyderabad quadrant and then target unworked habitats that fall into the sub-divisions and groups that Lister and I mentioned? A large group of birders must also be divided into smaller parties of maximum 4-5 persons who can then head towards and check out each micro-habitat in the area selected for an outing for its birds. Remember that birds and other wild animals prefer to live in, and visit, places that are generally unfrequented (or inhabited) by human beings so you have a better chance of good "twitching" (or more) if you head towards little visited countryside or jungle. Members (and readers) may also benefit by reading my quotes of Hugh Whistler in Letters # 55 & 56 (Pitta 138 & 139, October & November 2002) and then consulting those books for greater detail.

As a fine example of what Lister had recommended, there was a paper titled "Notes on the Birds of a selected area of Dehra Dun—June 1946 to July 1951" published by Mrs M.D. Wright (a rare lady birder in those days! "Ladybirds" are also beautiful little beetles of the family Coccinellidae, another special interest of mine, of which I have named and described a few new Indian species and have many more to "christen"! in the JBNHS (54: 627-662) in 1957 which dealt with a total of 226 species. She had also done "A Bird count in Dehra Dun" (JBNHS 48: 570-572A; 1949). These also have maps like Lister requested of authors and interested persons among you would do well to check out Mrs Wright's papers and model their own future surveys on them.

Sālim Ali's Hyderabad State Ornithological Surveys were carried out by him, with the taxidermal assistance of E. Heinrichs, of the Bombay Natural History Society, and of his "young cousin" Humayun Abdulali (when on his college vacations), from October 3rd to December 20th 1931 and March 1st to April 25th 1932. This singular amateur naturalist's initial regional bird survey was completed in a private capacity through a minimal grant of Rs 1,000 received from the then Nizām Government's "Museum Committee." His report was published in 5 parts, comprising a total of 125 pages, in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (36: 356-390, 707-725, 898-919 and 37: 124-142, 425-454) in 1933 and 1934, with a small 3-page additional note in 1938 (JBNHS 40: 497-499). Reprinted and bound (paperback) copies of this report are available with the BSAP, Hyderabad and would form an excellent model for modern birders who have the gumption and drive to do such important and critical bird surveys now. For a first attempt at a faunistic survey of a delimited area, by an unemployed bird watcher in his late thirties then, this work was of top quality at a time when practically all such fieldwork was being done by Britishers and other Europeans here. One such foreigner, Hugh Whistler, an erstwhile Indian Police Officer but then retired and based in England, was undoubtedly responsible, in large part, for this Indian's guidelines and success. Sālim Ali acknowledged Whistler in print for helping him with bird specimen identifications, taxonomic comments on the subspecies (which taxon had unfortunately been given precedence over species in those Hartert years), and also for "a number of notes from the literature dealing with neighbouring areas" Sālim Ali wrote. Sālim Ali and Hugh Whistler later continued with this partnership when compiling similar reports on the regional faunistic bird surveys made in other parts of British India (mainly in Indian Princely States) by Sālim Ali and his assistants for another decade or so until Whistler died, of cancer, in 1943. These papers must be credited to "Ali & Whistler" and not just to Sālim Ali as has been incorrectly done (e.g., see the 1974 INDIAN HANDBOOK, 1989 ANDHRA PRADESH CHECKLIST, etc.) but I note with approval that the 1995 BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX of Aasheesh Pittie adopts the correct authorship for these regional faunistic papers of Sālim Ali and Hugh Whistler. Sālim Ali's paper on the birds of Gujarat, soon after independence (1954-1955, JBNHS 52: 374-458, 735-802), lacked Whistler's input and possibly all the determinations of "subspecies" were done by himself, with occasional assistance from the now notoriously infamous Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen!

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, c/o Doddagubbi P.O., Bangalore 562 149 & indiavifauna@yahoo.co.uk

Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh – First (1st) Notice dated 5th July 2003

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on 15th September 2003 (15.09.2003) at Vidyaranya High School, Saifabad. The timing of the meeting is 6.00 p.m. All members are requested to attend. The tentative programme for the meeting is given below:

- 1) President's Report
- 2) Secretary's Report
- 3) Treasurer's Report
- 4) Proposed Changes to the Constitution
- 5) Appointment of Auditors
- 6) Election of Executive Committee Members (Members desirous of serving on the committee, please give their names to the Hon. Secretary)
- 7) Any other Business

SPOTLIGHT - MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*) By Siraj A. Taher

Like the males of the other two Harriers (Pallid and Hen) the male of the Montagu's (*Circus pygargus*) is also ashy-grey above and greyish white below. The two distinctive marks which make identification of this species easy are the dark primaries and a black band across the secondaries when looking from below, and the Rufous (or chestnut) coloured streaks on the belly and flanks.

Compared to the males of the other two species, the Pallid and the Hen, there are small differences in the extent of black on the primaries and the shades of grey of the body. The females of all these three species are very much more difficult to identify in the field, except with great practice. There are only minor differences in their overall brown plumage and barrings, rump widths and the bands on their tails. Immatures of *Circus pygargus* are similar to the females but deeper rufous below without streaks, which is diagnostic.

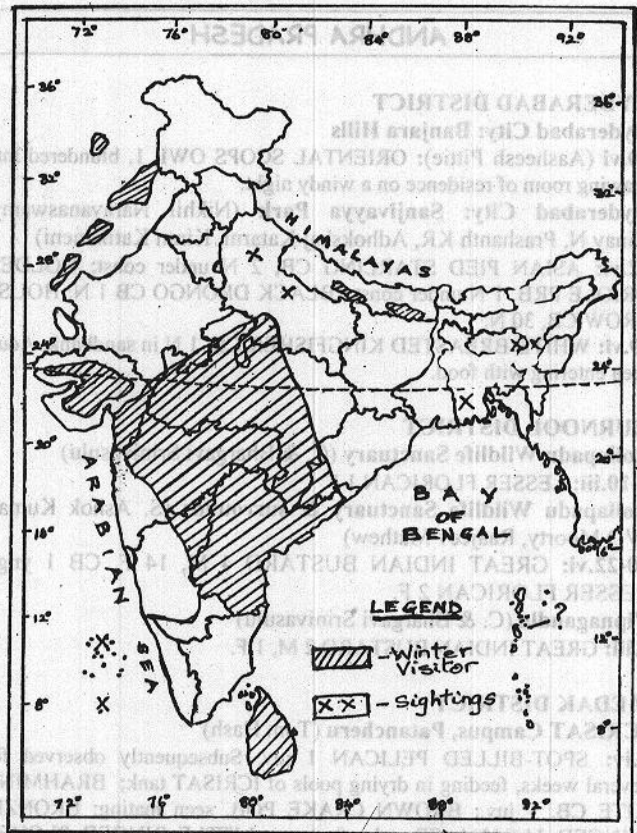
Ten species of the genus *Circus* are recognised in the world, out of which five species winter in the Indian sub-continent.

Like the other three harriers (except the Marsh), the preferred habitat of the Montagu's Harrier is open, grassy tracts, thinly cultivated fields and light scrub. They prefer to sit on the ground rather than perch in trees or bushes. Usually, they are solitary hunters, preferring to hunt by day. Usually roosts communally but has been occasionally seen in mixed groups. Mainly it is a silent bird, but has been heard to give out calls when coming in to roost, probably to identify its own specie.

Its food consists of lizards, grasshoppers, bird nestlings, small snakes and mammals and frogs. In their breeding grounds, they are seen to breed between May – July in England, Northern Europe, Western Asia (south of 57°N), Spain and Northwest Africa. The nest, made of grass and reeds is built on the ground in a field or in a bed of bulrushes near a swamp. The normal clutch is 4 – 6 plain bluish-white eggs, sometimes blotched with pale red. The female only incubates for 28 days. Both sexes take part in the care and feeding of the chicks.

The Montagu's Harrier, like the others of its genus, is a winter visitor to the Sub-continent, Pakistan, Palestine and Southern Africa, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In India, it is fairly widely distributed from the foothills of the Himalayas, Assam, rare in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, the Andamans and Lakshadweep Islands. It is observed less frequently than the Pallid Harrier in most of India, but records show the Montagu's to be seen more often than the Pallid around Hyderabad city and surrounding areas. In Andhra Pradesh the early records are from Paloncha (Khammam Dist.), Kolair (Kolleru, W. Godavari Dist.) and Siddhout (Siddhavatam, Cuddapah Dist.). Recent records are from Medak, Ranga Reddy, Kadapa (Cuddapah) and Kurnool

Districts. In Hyderabad, the first date of arrival is 19th September and the last date of departure has been noted as 31st March.



As with most of the Harriers, fewer birds are being seen than a couple of years earlier, even in places where they were regularly seen. Loss of habitat, excessive use of pesticides and shooting down by farmers and game bird preserve managers could be the reasons for this decline in numbers. In Britain and Europe, appreciable reduction in breeding numbers has been noticed. No studies have been undertaken in any of their breeding areas, migration routes or wintering grounds to determine this population decline. This lack of data and the necessity to take proper action in various countries rather than any one makes the problem of conservation of any migratory specie very complex.

For the conservation process of the birds of the genus *Circus*, it is vital to educate the main enemies of these birds, viz. the farmers and range managers in their breeding grounds; and land developers and heavy pesticide users in their wintering quarters. No bird of prey is destructive to human interests and whether it is large or small, it never feeds exclusively on domestic stock. In fact, they are our friends in that they destroy more rats and rodents than they would the farmyard stock. Hence all hawks should command our respect.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '**' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii; 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2002. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hyderabad City: Banjara Hills

20.vi (Aasheesh Pittie): ORIENTAL SCOPS OWL 1, blundered into drawing room of residence on a windy night.

Hyderabad City: Sanjivayya Park (Nikhil Narayanaswamy, Vinay N, Prashanth KR, Adhokshaj Katarni, Kiran Katikaneni)

22.vi: ASIAN PIED STARLING CB, 2 N under const; GOLDEN ORIOLE PRB, 1 N under const.; BLACK DRONGO CB 1 N; HOUSE CROW CB, 30 N.

29.vi: WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER CB, 1 N in sandbank. Adult seen entering with food.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary (C. & Bhargavi Srinivasulu)

9-10.iii: LESSER FLORICAN 1 F.

Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary & surrounds (S. Ashok Kumar, JVD Moorthy, Raajeev Mathew)

20-22.vi: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 4 M, 14 F, CB 1 yng.; LESSER FLORICAN 2 F.

Vipnagandla (C. & Bhargavi Srinivasulu)

9.iii: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 2 M, 1 F.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus, Patancheru (Tom Hash)

2.iv: SPOT-BILLED PELICAN 1 juv. Subsequently observed for several weeks, feeding in drying pools of ICRISAT tank; BRAHMINY KITE CB, 1 juv.; BROWN CRAKE POB, seen mating; BRONZE-WINGED JACANA CB, ads. & imm.; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER CB, ad. & imm.; INDIAN TREEPIE robbing nest, and eating blue-shelled eggs, of Red-vented Bulbul.

13.iv: GREY FRANCOLIN CB, ads., with downy chicks; several families seen at different parts of the farm this month; CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE M and F; first record inside ICRISAT campus; SIRKEER MALKOHA first record inside ICRISAT campus; HOPOE CB, one ad., passed food to another who carried it into a crack—missing mortar—between stones in the wall of the Manmool fortress.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantgiri (Kiran Katikaneni, Vinay, Zubin)

25.v: CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE CB, 1 N with yng.

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu Heronry (K. Mrutyumjaya Rao)

13.iii: SPOT-BILLED PELICAN CB, 550 including immatures, 120 N; BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON 300; PAINTED STORK CB 400 N, almost all with yng.; PURPLE MOORHEN CB 14 N in *Typha* sp.

VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Araku (C. & Bhargavi Srinivasulu)

3.iii: ASIAN PIED STARLING.

Damuku (C. & Bhargavi Srinivasulu)

14-16.iii: BLACK EAGLE 7; BLACK-CRESTED BULBUL 3.

Sankrametta (C. & Bhargavi Srinivasulu)

3.iii: BLACK EAGLE 1.

Tyda (C. & Bhargavi Srinivasulu)

2-4.iii: BLACK-CRESTED BULBUL 5; BLUE-HEADED ROCK THRUSH 1.

14-16.iii: CRESTED GOSHAWK 1 M.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT

Chapora Estuary (Heinz Lainer)

7.ii: WESTERN REEF-EGRET 55+; SLENDER-BILLED GULL 440+.

23.ii: SANDWICH TERN 50+.

9.iv: SLENDER-BILLED GULL 1; GULL-BILLED TERN 106 (39 in br. plm.); COMMON TERN 1 br. plm.

Tivim-Damedem (Heinz Lainer)

16.iii: BESRA SPARROWHAWK POB 1 juv.; LESSER SPOTTED

EAGLE 1 juv.

Anjuna (Heinz Lainer)

5.iv: SHIKRA PRB, pair; CRIMSON SUNBIRD 1 M non-br. plm.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT

Dudhsagar Top (Heinz Lainer)

22-25.iv: NILGIRI WOOD-PIGEON 1; BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER 1; WHITE-CHEEKED BARBET CB; SMALL YELLOW-NAPED WOODPECKER 4; INDIAN BLUE ROBIN 1 M; WYNAAD LAUGHINGTHRUSH 5+; INDIAN RUFOUS BABBLER 5+.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tik-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 148: August 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608). Seats *may* be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 24-viii-2003: Vanasthalipuram Deer Park, Ranga Reddy District: Route: Malakpet – Dilshukhnagar – LB Nagar. Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am. It is anticipated that there will be some new species of birds on this trip because we will be visiting an area which has newly been added to the park. Rosy Pastors may be sighted, possibly Short-toed Eagles and Greenbilled Malkoha. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-viii-2002, 6pm: Talk by Raajeev Mathew on Birds of Prey, Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings of the Society - Field Trip to Chilkur Deer Park on 27th July 2003.

Then, it was on the 24th Nov 2002, now it was on 27th July 03. We were going back to a place where we all had been united with Nature, Mrugavani National Park-Chilkur. We were here last year with Kids for tigers and are now here with BSAP.

Compared to the previous year, the park was much more beautiful due to rains. It was hard to see birds, but we managed to see a **roller**. Trying to get a closer look at it, all I was able to do was run from tree to tree. A couple of **purple rumped sunbirds**, dim due to the cloudy sky, greeted us with their remaining splendour. We saw a **Cormorant** flying overhead, probably rejoicing that the monsoons had set in. From the gates we hiked on to the watchtower. The beauty of the place enthralled us; trees were lush green and were full of leaves, if not flowers.

Bulbuls were a common sight in this park but they preferred to be unseen. At last we reached the tower. Beautiful! Enchanting! Anyone would go into a Trance at the sight. Acres and acres of green forestland stretched in front of us. From our perch we had a perfect view of a lake that was flooded with water.

Three **Spot billed ducks** and a few **River terns** encircled the area, like vultures before they disappeared from sight (It was as if the ducks were posing for a photograph). We did some climbing on the rocks and we found out that the park, true to

the words that it was among the best places for rock formation.

We saw a large number of hoof marks obviously left behind by a herd of **spotted deer**. Mr. Ravi a wild life photographer showed us how to draw tiger pugmarks. Tough to draw, I'd say. We hadn't yet recovered from the trance of the view when Kiran spotted another beauty-a **Pied cuckoo**, like a black and white television perched on a tree just above the car parking. We also saw a few insects like the **velvet mite**, the **six spotted tiger beetle**, **millipedes** and **centipedes**.

On the way back home, we saw some elegant **king fishers**, **orioles** and **weaverbirds**. I reached home at 1.30 pm praying that this National park must not be destroyed like the Forest of Ananthagiri.

NIKHIL.N

BSAP - SINGARENI COLLIERIES EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS - CAMPS AND TEACHERS TRAINING PROGRAMMES.

As part of the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL), and BSAP joint programmes for Environmental Awareness, Nature Studies and Birding Fieldwork, the Society deputed Humayun Taher to start with the Nature Study and Birdwatching trips for some of their educational institutions which were participating in camps at Chilkur Deer Park, Rangareddi Dist. along with the A.P. Forest Department. These camps were held on 28 June

and 6 July in which three schools participated in each of the programmes. On 13 July, two women's degree colleges took part in the camp. The programme consisted of taking the participants on a field walk through the park and explaining about nature, birds and animals. There were also lectures on the subject after the field trip was completed.

The next programme included Teachers Training Workshops on 17 – 19 July at Kothagudem (Khammam Dist.) and 21 – 23 July at Godavarikhani (Karimnagar Dist.) The BSAP was not involved with the third workshop conducted from 24 – 26 July at Bellampalli (Adilabad Dist.) For these workshops also Humayun Taher conducted the first day's proceedings for the participating teachers. The topics covered were Evolution and Biological Diversity. A PowerPoint presentation was specially prepared for the occasion. Response was quite good and the teachers appeared to show much enthusiasm in implementing the training at their respective schools.

The Society has prepared a special syllabus to be implemented in the educational institutions of the SCCL after their concurrence and acceptance of the subjects covered. Even though the emphasis in this syllabus will be on avifauna, it under no conditions will be restricted to birds only and will encompass all aspects of the natural world, their interactions and interdependence.

Books & Journals received

The BSAP reading room received the following books and journals/periodicals during July 2003.

Books

The Society's library was substantially enriched when we received a generous donation of 10 books from the **World Land Trust**, U.K. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in making this possible. At the World Land Trust we would like to thank Miss Kirsty Forbes (Projects Manager) and Molly St. George (Manager, NGO, Book Distribution Service). When they informed us that the books were ready and we could collect them (in London), we thought we were stuck. But our Life Member and well wisher, Mary Peacock made it all seem so easy. Christine, her daughter, collected and kept them in London. Dr Surendra Ugale, an old friend, who is keenly interested in wildlife, solved the problem of bringing them to India from London. BSAP relies heavily on the support of its members and they seldom let us down. We are indebted to Mary Peacock, Christine Peacock and Dr Surendra Ugale.

In the same league of friends are Bikram Grewal and Bill Harvey, who donated a copy of their latest book, to our library.

1. Davies, S.J.J.F. (2002): Ratites and Tinamous. Oxford University Press, London. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
2. Fuller, Errol (2001): Extinct Birds. New ed. Oxford University Press, London. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].

3. Gibbs, David, Eustace Barnes & John Cox (2001): Pigeons and Doves. A Guide to the Pigeons and Doves of the World. Pica Press, U.K. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
4. Heath, M.F. & M.I. Evans (Eds.) (2001): Important Bird Areas in Europe. Priority Sites for Conservation. Southern Europe. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Cambridge, U.K. BirdLife International. (BirdLife Conservation Series No. 8). [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
5. Inskipp, Carol (1988): A Birdwatchers' Guide to Nepal. Prion Ltd., U.K. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
6. Mackinnon, John & Karen Phillipps (2000): A Field Guide to the Birds of China. Oxford University Press, London. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
7. Matthiessen, Peter (2002): The Birds of Heaven. Travels with Cranes. Harvill Press, U.S.A. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
8. National Geographic Society (????): Field Guide to the Birds of North America. 3rd ed. National Geographic, America. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
9. Nethersole-Thompson, Desmond & Maimie (1991): Waders. Their Breeding, Haunts and Watchers. 2nd ed. T. & A.D. Poyser, U.K. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
10. Simpson, Ken & Nicolas Day (1999): Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. Helm Publishers. [Donated by the World Land Trust, U.K.].
11. Grewal, Bikram; Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister (2002): A Photographic Guide to the Birds of India and the Indian Subcontinent, Including Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka & the Maldives. Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd., Hong Kong. [Donated by the authors.].

Journals / Periodicals

1. Down to Earth. Vol. 12. No. 3. June 30, 2003 [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
2. Down to Earth. Vol. 12. No. 4. July 15, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
3. Birdwatchers' Digest. Vol. 25. No. 6. July-August 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
4. Samsad News. Vol. 21. No. 6. June 2003. [Exchange.].
5. Channel 6. July 2003. [Subscription copy.].
6. Protected Area Update. No. 43. June 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON CONSERVATION

Birds of Prey have been significantly hit in recent times, as far as conservation is concerned. The most glaring example of this, of course, is the worldwide decline in Vulture populations, a phenomenon so alarming that special programmes have been hastily implemented to try and get to the root of the problem and find a solution. But Vultures are not the only species that have suffered. The

American Peregrine Falcon was almost extinct before conservationists and scientists began to take note and, thanks to successful captive breeding programmes and releases, a very satisfactory recovery of the species was made.

Release of species into wilderness areas is something which is still partly clouded in controversy. To take just one example, several years ago Barn Owls were released in the Andaman Islands to combat rodents, and replace the extinct endemic Andaman Barn Owl. For several reasons, the released birds failed to adapt to the environment and the experiment proved a failure. This prompted the question, did the Andaman subspecies of Barn Owls become extinct from habitat loss, excessive persecution, or an inability to adapt to a changing environment. It is important in any release programme to determine exactly what effects the release will have *before* releasing animals or birds into a new habitat.

Coming back to conservation of species – exactly what constitutes conservation? Does it involve protection of the species through protecting its habitat? Or taking care of the food supplies and breeding areas of the species, (the House Sparrow is a good example of this, where packed rice and apartment houses have robbed it of both food supplies and nesting places). Or does it constitute complete *ex-situ* conservation, through zoological parks and nature preserves.

I think it is fair to say that conservation encompasses all the above and then some more. For example, if we are trying to protect the Indian Tiger, there is no point in saying protect the animals in artificial areas such as zoological parks or breeding programmes. Conservation of the species should include conservation of its habitat and the prey species on which it subsists. This is, of course, the concept of *Umbrella Species*, which has gained momentum of late and is now recognised as one of the leading conservation strategies.

Currently, looking around at the prevailing situation, there appears to be a growing awareness in all circles of the need for conservation of species and the habitat. Unfortunately, at some of the highest levels, this is not reflected. It is all too apparent, at a cursory glance at the newspapers, that several pristine habitats are in imminent danger of disappearing without a trace. The Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park is a prime example of this, where encroachment and degradation of the habitat, in the name of *Development*, is rampant. It is resulting in the complete destruction of one of the last remaining areas of natural habitats in the city and a unique ecosystem, which can never be replaced or repaired. This may sound harsh, but it is all too true. Development should not mean the destruction of natural habitats. It is fair to say that no one would object to development if done properly; but not at the expense of natural ecosystems.

The University of Hyderabad is another place where conservation measures need to be implemented with immediate effect. The once existing area has already been encroached on to an alarming effect, what with large tracts of land already having been given away to agencies like the

sports authorities for stadiums and for educational institutions such as the IIT, amongst others. It seems almost criminal that these pristine wildlife areas have been appropriated by agencies which have no interest in preserving the natural habitat as it should be, and those agencies which would like to do so are handicapped by interference at high levels.

We really need to rethink our approach to conservation. Programmes like *Clean and Green* sound wonderful on paper, but their implementation leaves a lot to be desired. Green does not, in this part of the country, mean artificial lawns and exotic flowering trees. Trees like Jacaranda and even Eucalyptus are not endemic to the subcontinent and have a detrimental effect on the ecosystem. Neither are smooth lawns part of the natural habitat of the region. No one objects to the green drive, provided it is done properly. Planting of natural and endemic trees such as Peepul, Neem, Mango, Tamarind and such like, although taking a long time to grow, does more to preserve and better the habitat than planting ten times the number of exotic species. It is almost tantamount to thoughtlessness the way natural trees and plants are being cut down to be replaced with grass lawns and flowering trees. This is resulting in lost habitat for several species. Take a few moments to reflect on how many species are seen on eucalyptus trees – you can count the numbers on the finger of one hand. It is safe to say that the Eucalyptus tree does not support any natural life – animal or plant. Even the bushes growing under the tree soon die, robbed of the moisture, which is appropriated by the Eucalyptus.

Where will all this end? We have a great responsibility towards protecting our environment, and we are shirking our responsibility to an alarming extent. In the words of Gerald Durrell, one of the foremost naturalists of his generation – “We have inherited an incredibly beautiful and complex garden . . . but the fact is that we have been appallingly bad gardeners. . . .” This is exactly what has happened today. It is all very well to blame everything on bureaucracy and government and just sit back and lament on the situation. But the fact is that – what are we doing to try and prevent it from happening and to bring it home to the concerned agencies that what they are doing is wrong. One voice cannot perhaps be heard – but a hundred voices can be. Look at the *Chipko* movement. One man – Sunderlal Bahuguna – started the movement which soon graduated into a revolution. Green Peace, which started with one rowboat and a handful of people opposing the whaling industry grew into a worldwide movement which now encompasses the globe. Collectively we can all make a difference – on whether the earth survives, or it dies and we die with it!

Perhaps it is now time to retake a certain promise, which I think every person who is interested in nature should make. This saying has been adopted by the Timbavati Nature Reserve in South Africa and simply says, “*The wildlife of today is not ours to do with as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after us.*”

WHAT MAKES A BIRDWATCHER

*Adapted from an article by Simon Barnes in **Birds**, the RSPB Magazine, Spring 2003, Vol. 19 No. 5 with suitable changes in bird and area names to reflect Indian scenarios.*

Transcribe my field notebook into a diary. Send my sightings of the Orphean Warbler to the rarities committee. Add this morning's details to my study of population dynamics of Indian Corvids. Recognise a Curlew Sandpiper in a flock of Dunlins thanks to my acute eyes and long familiarity with both species.

These are all things that I haven't done today. But I have just seen a bunch of House Crows riding a Ferris wheel of air and shouting like hooligans as they did so. And I can hear the chatter and gossip from a very merry band of House Sparrows: there are so few left nowadays that it's worthwhile trying to understand what they are saying. That's not a bad day's birdwatching.

I think it's time we opened a campaign for the preservation of that threatened species, the bad birdwatcher. I think we need to recruit more and more bad birdwatchers: we need vast and serried ranks of people peering unashamedly through cheap (or expensive) binoculars and thumbing through their field guides wondering if that's a Mallard or on the other hand, perhaps it's only a domestic duck. Or maybe a Spoonbill.

It's one of those heresies of the current century: that you have to be an expert on something before there is any point in doing it. I'm a bad birdwatcher myself. I'd like to claim that I am a *good* bad birdwatcher – like Hamlet, when the wind was southerly I can tell a hawk from a handsaw – but I'm not the man you want if you are keen on picking out that Curlew Sandpiper.

The way to becoming a bad birdwatcher is open to us all: but there are an awful lot of obstacles. The first is the publicity given to the twitching fraternity, those collectors of rarities, lost souls who hit these areas by mistake and generally die soon after. The birds, that is, not the twitchers.

There is the notion that to be a birdwatcher, you must be obsessed by rarities. This is nonsense – as most twitchers will tell you on their saner days. This collection-mania is just a young-man's thing, like riding motorcycles at lightning speeds, or going to cricket matches and drinking several pints of lager. There are other ways of enjoying life, other ways of enjoying birds.

Which is what it's all about. But it's so intimidating. You get a very basic field guide: and you discover at once that the Reed Warbler and the Chiffchaff are more or less identical, so are the Verditer and Dull-Blue Flycatcher, so are the Roseate and Common Terns. The only answer is to give up at once.

Or say you are going to the seaside. You'll just watch seagulls and enjoy them, because they're easy to see and easy to tell apart. Then you try to tell a second winter Yellow-Legged Gull from a first winter Heuglin's Gull – and decide to chuck the book into the sea, and your binoculars afterwards.

It's just too hard to be a good birdwatcher. But the answer is not to give up. It is to become a bad birdwatcher. A sudden cacophony in the trees overhead. What are those mad little birds? Not a clue. Ah, but it gives you a chance to revel in the amazing diversity of forms in which life comes, in the endless forms most beautiful.

The thing is to banish the sense of guilt. Say you don't know what kind of bird it was, even after you have looked it up in the book. The nearest thing is a Graceful Prinia (resident of Israel). Never mind, it was a great bird – Remember it as "possible Graceful Prinia". But keep quiet about it.

It's possible you wouldn't be able to pick out a Marsh Warbler because you recognise its imitation of the African species it meets on migration. Never mind: it's a great concert. And if you wish, note it down as European Cuckoo (prob).

The point of birdwatching often gets lost. The point of birdwatching is not making lists, or seeking rarities, or becoming immensely talented, or making a contribution to science. The point of birdwatching is watching birds: and it's something that is open to all of us.

So here is my advice to anyone who likes birds and wants to enjoy them just a little bit more. Just watch them. End of advice. Oh, all right, you can look them up, put a name to them and you'll find that adds to the pleasure. Learning half-a-dozen songs from a tape will positively double your pleasure in the garden or park.

Birdwatching is not a specialised hobby, it is not necessarily an obsession. It is simply a way of living: of living with your eyes and ears open, and finding that birds enrich every day of your life. That's why everybody who is not a *good* birdwatcher should make a real effort to become a *bad* birdwatcher.

OBITUARY

CHRIS MEAD 1940 – 2003

Chris mead assured the editors (of BIRDS) that he was planning enough 'Learning about birds' features for BIRDS for several more years shortly before he died, unexpectedly, in his sleep in January 2003. His dedication and enthusiasm for birds started in his student days when he took up bird ringing – he personally caught and ringed a massive 400,000 birds. He trained and inspired dozens of others with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) until he retired in 1994. He was head of the British national ringing scheme for many years and was largely responsible for the computerization of ringing information – making a big impact on bird conservation. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of birds and an amazing ability to recall and present facts in novel and interesting ways, so well demonstrated in his 'Learning about birds' series for BIRDS.

He was a popular spokesman for birds and was keen to share his huge knowledge via the web and his books. His *The State of the Nations' Birds* combines an analysis of abundant data with his inimitable popular touch, including glum and smiley faces and soaring and diving birds to indicate changing species' fortunes.

He was honoured with medals from the BTO, the British Ornithologists' Union and the RSPB, and will be remembered for conveying his wonder at the life of birds to so many others. A great many people will miss him.

ROY SEBASTIAN 1931 - 2003

Roy Sebastian had been a member of the BSAP for several years. His passing away has left a number of friends who would miss him at the Society outings, indoor meetings and at organizational works.

Roy was basically a soil scientist by profession, who worked initially in the Agriculture Department before joining EID Parry Fertilizer Division, from where he moved on to Godavari Fertilizers. He was an accomplished photographer and thoroughly enjoyed his pursuits in this field. Roy joined the Horticulture Society at Hyderabad, from where he used his knowledge and experience for the benefit of all those interested in gardening and horticulture. He always boasted of Late Dr. Salim Ali's visit to a friend's farm in Nizamabad and his birding trips with the great man. It was as if to tell us all that he was one-up over all the others. He even would show his Book of Indian Birds, in which Salim Ali had made notations and also marked the birds sighted at the farm.

It never looked that Roy would leave us so suddenly for his heavenly abode, as he was still active with his photography and gardening advice at the Horticulture Society.

The BSAP conveys its condolences to his wife and other members of the bereaved family.

Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh – Second (2nd) Notice dated 10th August 2003

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on 15th September 2003 (15.09.2003) at Vidyaranya High School, Saifabad. The timing of the meeting is 6.00 p.m. All members are requested to attend. The tentative programme for the meeting is given below:

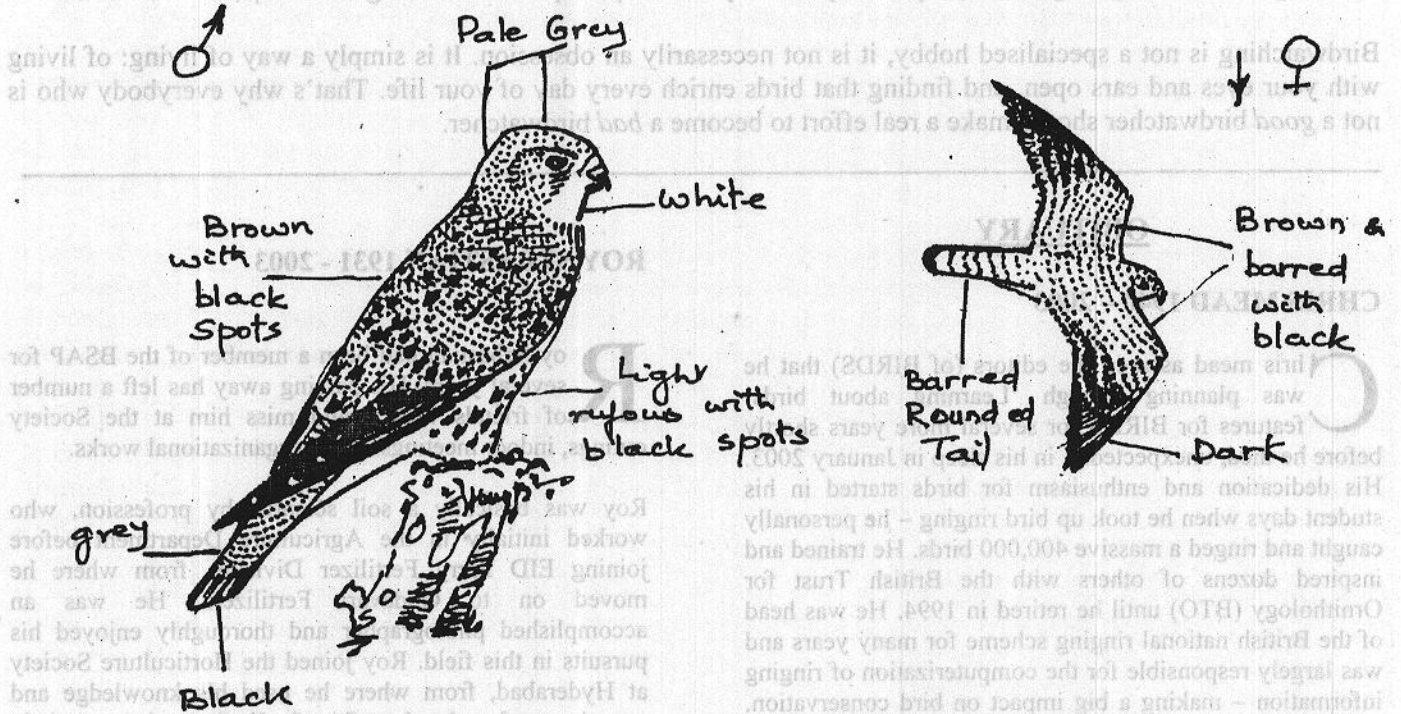
- 1) President's Report
- 2) Secretary's Report
- 3) Treasurer's Report
- 4) Proposed Changes to the Constitution
- 5) Appointment of Auditors
- 6) Election of Executive Committee Members (Members desirous of serving on the committee, please give their names to the Hon. Secretary)
- 7) Any other Business

FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

COMMON KESTREL

(*Falco tinnunculus*)

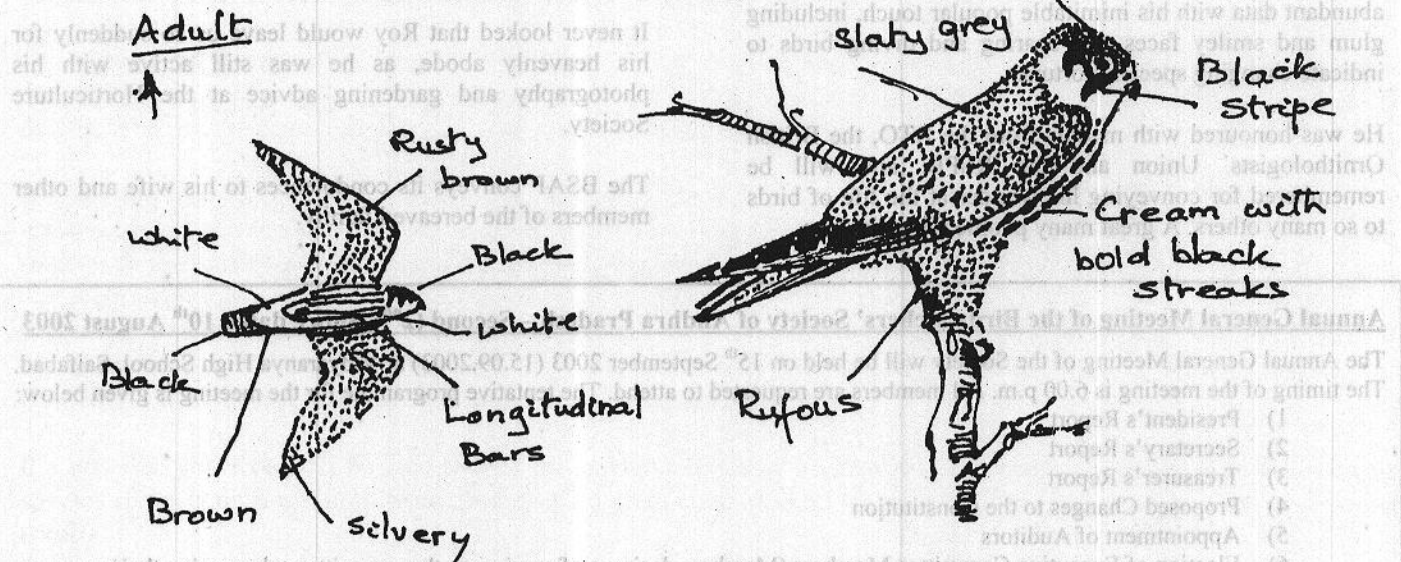
32-35 mm. - Pigeon ±



EURASIAN HOBBY

(*Falco subbuteo*)

30-36 cms. Pigeon ±



Where have all the Sparrows Gone - and Why?

The House Sparrow is one of our most familiar and popular birds. However, in recent years, their numbers have declined – sufficient for them now to be placed on the “Red List” of threatened birds. We need to know which areas in Andhra Pradesh (or elsewhere in India) still have House Sparrows. And that is why we are

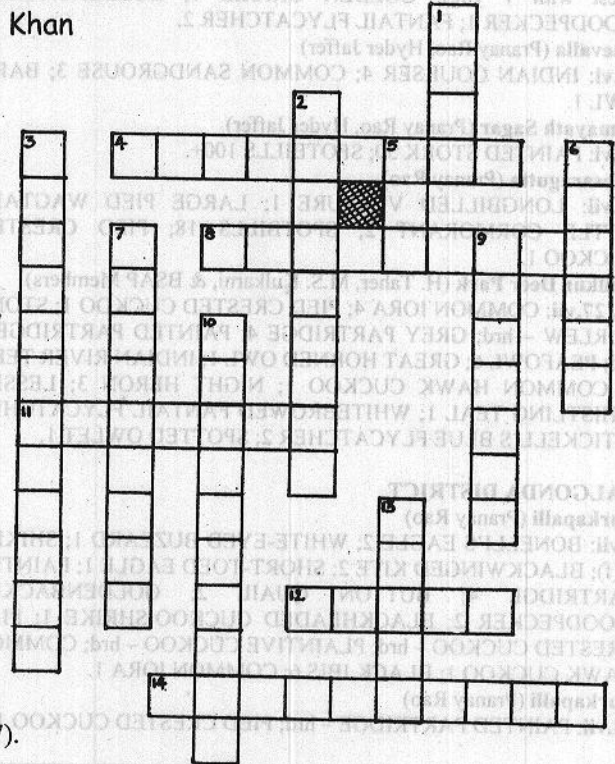
asking you to count the sparrows where you live, or wherever you see them, however small the numbers may be. This you can do on any day from 1st of September to 31st of December 2003. You can send us these counts in a simple format just giving the date, place, no. of birds, any nesting activities, young, food being taken (if noticed), any other information.

BIRDWORD PUZZLE - No. 4

By M.M. Ali Khan

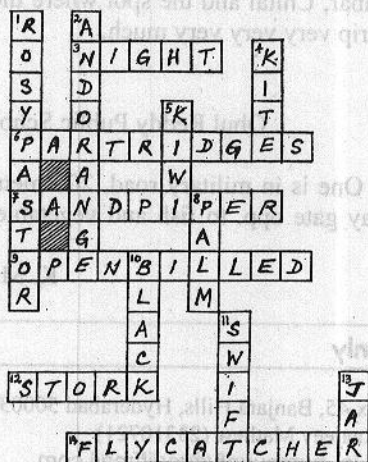
Note: Figures in Brackets denote number of alphabets
The puzzle contains bird names only
Correct solution to this puzzle will be given in the next issue of PITTA

1. Baked big plant but not to eat (4,3).
2. Silver ... feed ending with bill (9).
- 3 & 10. Has Midas touched the forest kissers back (12,10)?
4. Hamelin man on the beach (9).
5. See (1)
6. RED RAT changes (6)
7. ERR and INVERT on running water (9).
8. He excavates (9).
9. See (14).
10. See (3).
11. Wise bird watching stored straw (7).
- 12 & 13. GLARE and GREET together (5,5).
- 14 & 9. Leads danger away from nest with shrill cries (10,7).



Members are requested to send their solutions to PITTA at the Society address. The correct entries will be entered for a draw. The lucky winner receives a BSAP cap, donated by Mr. M.M. Ali Khan.

Solution to Birdword Puzzle - No. 3



SOCIETY T-SHIRTS AND CAPS NOW AVAILABLE FOR SALE:

Grey (With Society Logo)

Sizes: XL, L, M

Rs. 150.00 each

White (House Sparrow design)

Sizes: XL, L, M, S

Rs. 200.00 each

Caps (With Society Logo)

Rs. 75.00 each

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status '**' follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2003. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Vikarabad (Pranay Rao, Hyder Jaffer)

29.vi: BROWN FISH OWL 2; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE -CB (Nest with 1 yng); GOLDEN ORIOLE 1; GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER 1; FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 2.

Chevalla (Pranay Rao, Hyder Jaffer)

29.vi: INDIAN COURSER 4; COMMON SANDGROUSE 3; BARN OWL 1.

Himayath Sagar (Pranay Rao, Hyder Jaffer)

29.vi: PAINTED STORK 50; SPOTBILLS 100+.

Keesaragutta (Pranay Rao)

24.vii: LONGBILLED VULTURE 1; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL; LITTLE CORMORANT 2; SPOTBILLS 18; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1.

Chilkur Deer Park (H. Taher, M.S. Kulkarni, & BSAP Members)

26, 27.vii: COMMON IORA 4; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; STONE CURLEW - hrd; GREY PARTRIDGE 4; PAINTED PARTRIDGE - hrd; PEAFOWL 6; GREAT HORNED OWL 1; INDIAN RIVER TERN 3; COMMON HAWK CUCKOO 1; NIGHT HERON 3; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 1; WHITEBROWED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 1; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER 2; SPOTTED OWLET 1.

NALGONDA DISTRICT

Turkapalli (Pranay Rao)

1.vii: BONELLI'S EAGLE 2; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1; SHIKRA 2 (f); BLACKWINGED KITE 2; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1; PAINTED PARTRIDGE 4; BUTTON QUAIL 2; GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER 2; BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 1; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO - hrd; PLAINTIVE CUCKOO - hrd; COMMON HAWK CUCKOO 1; BLACK IBIS 6; COMMON IORA 1.

Turkapalli (Pranay Rao)

24.vii: PAINTED PARTRIDGE - hrd; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1.

KHAMMAM DISTRICT

Kothagudem (Humayun Taher)

17.vii: BLACK IBIS 25; PIED MYNA 12; HOUSE SPARROW 8; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL 1; SPOTTED OWLET 2.

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu (K. Mrutyumjaya Rao)

1.vii: GREY PELICAN juv 19; PAINTED STORK juv 150, ad 50; COOTS 88; LITTLE EGRET br. plm. 160; NIGHT HERON 1100+; LITTLE CORMORANT 30; PURPLE HERON 1; PURPLE MOORHEN 7; BRONZEWINGED JACANA 4; JUNGLE CROW 37; OPENBILLED STORK 450+; WHITE IBIS 7.

EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT

Kakinada Town (K. Mrutyumjaya Rao)

17.vii: HOUSE SPARROW 110.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c.-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

PIGEON POST

1) I visited Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur on Saturday and Sunday along with my grandfather. In the evening I saw the Sambar and Chital deers in the bushes. For the first time I saw the Pied Crested Cuckoo, Sunbird, Jungle Crow, Drongo, Egrets, River Terns, Hoopoe, Roseringed Parakeet, Spotted Dove, Redvented Bulbul and Iora. I also heard the call of the Peafowl and the music of Koel. On the way we saw prints of Peacock, Sambar, Chital and the spot where the wild boar had dug a small pit for roots. We went up the tower to see the city. I enjoyed the trip very very very much.

R. Sreekar

Class IV

Obul Reddy Public School, Jubilee Hills

2) recently I observed two new House Sparrow roosting sites in Kakinada. One is in military road, 200 metres from Sarada Devi Temple with 70 Sparrows, and another near the RTC Complex railway gate opp. to fish and vegetable market, where there were 40 birds. Both trees are *Pongamia pinnata*.

K. Mrutyumjaya Rao

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.

IP TTA



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 149: September 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 21-ix-2003: Shamirpet Lake and Deer Park, Ranga Reddy District: Route: Secunderabad – Trimulgherry – Cantonment. Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am. Interesting sightings may include Greyheaded Buntings, possibly Peregrine Falcons and lots of woodland birds. There may also be interesting waterbirds in the Shamirpet Lake. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and snacks. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 15-ix-2003, 6pm: Annual General Meeting of the Society, Vidyananya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings of the Society - Field Trip to Vanasthalipuram Deer Park on 24th August 2003.

By M. Shafaat Ulla

The park, which is situated about 30 km. from the city just after Dilsukhnagar on the Vijayawada road, has a protected area of 3605 acres consisting of thorn and dry scrub forest, and grasslands typical of the Deccan Plateau. It has a considerable population of Blackbuck and Spotted Deer introduced by the Forest Department. It also has a wide variety of birds, both resident and local migrants, and winter migrants which come in from October to March.

Mr. Shankaran, Curator National Parks of the A.P. Forest Department, was kind enough to inform us that a further area of 1000 acres has been added to the park and hence it was decided to explore the place as it was a few years since the BSAP had organised an outing to the park.

We all gathered promptly at the gate, 17 members in all, and started walking into the park at 7:15 am. The first thing we noticed was the presence of hundreds of Pariah Kites and Crows, mostly on the western and northern side of the park, adjacent to the municipal garbage dump. Obviously there was a lot of food of their liking available, and a foul smell pervaded all over the park. The second aspect that we noticed was the near total absence of bird life. Initially we heard a Peafowl, the cackle of Large Grey Babblers followed by the call of a Partridge. A while later we saw a solitary male Koel

and a pair of Drongos. Later, on a side road near a bund we came upon the nest of a Peafowl with four eggs.

It was now about 9:30 a.m. and we decided to take a break for refreshments. We were hardly through when Mr. Jagdish Chandra of the Forest Department suggested that we visit the newly acquired area to the north which is more thickly forested. We all agreed instantly and set course behind Mr. Gopinath, our guide.

After a good walk of about two kilometres through thick foliage, we came to an elevated watch tower and climbed into it and had a breathtaking view of almost the entire Hyderabad city. It should be mentioned here that we were again disappointed by the lack of bird life. To be exact, we saw one juvenile Shikra, a pair of Redwattled Lapwings and a single Little Brown Dove in flight, not to forget four Mynas on a distant tall tree. In fact, the joke going around was that the birds had called a "bandh" that day, probably influenced by our politicians!

After rejuvenating ourselves with a half hour rest atop the tower platform and in the steady and cool breeze, we headed back for the gate and arrived there by about 12:30 p.m. having clocked about 8 km. and a thoroughly enjoyable, albeit exhausting, outing.

It is the opinion of many of us that a few BSAP volunteers should visit the park regularly for a few days to establish if the near absence of birds was a one time phenomenon or whether the birds are actually avoiding the park because of Kites and Crows or the smell from the dump or for any other reason.

Editor's Note: One of the reasons for not seeing many birds could be that in a thickly foliated area or a forest, instead of continuously walking and expecting to see birds all over, one has to remain in one place quietly for sometime to first hear and locate a bird or see one. The name of the game is "patience". Still it will be a good idea, as Shafaat Ulla has suggested, to regularly monitor the new area.

Taking Wing on Heads and Tails: ID-ing Birds of Prey

(Based on a talk given by Raajeev Mathew at the Indoor Meeting of the Society on 18th August)

By M. Shobha

Be-bop-a-lula, it's BOP time, folks! Oldies walking into the Vidyaranya School auditorium to attend the indoor meeting of the 18th of August may well be forgiven for presuming that they had come to the wrong venue given the number of new members gathered there! The ID idea was in the air and Raajeev Mathew, the Expert, was going to make a presentation about the nuances of identifying birds of prey. Literally sketching his way through an hour-and-a-half long presentation on 'BOP for Beginners', Raajeev held forth on the jizz of eagles, kites, hawks, falcons, buzzards, harriers and vultures.

The jizz of a bird is its general appearance; the information we gather about its shape and size that helps us label the bird right down to the species level. So, when we are on a field trip, it is the jizz of a bird that helps us swoop down on its Order and Genus, before pinning it to a species. Raajeev advised that we first take in the aspect of the bird – its proportion, shape and size. Then observe the wings and the tail: are they long, broad, tapering or rounded? The long and short of it is that you have to be Observant. And happily for us all, that calls for a lot of birding.

Raptors send us into raptures, no doubt, but how many of us pay attention to their countenance in overhead flight, head-on silhouette, wing patterns, tail patterns, wing span, stage of plumage, *et al?* It requires perhaps nothing less than the enduring enthusiasm of a Scientist, for ID-ing birds of prey willy-nilly sets apart the serious birder from the also-rans.

Tackling the Tails

The distinguishing feature of eagles (the Genus *Aquila* of the Order Falconiformes) is their moderate tail in relation to its overall size. The Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) has a tail that is rounded off better at the edges and is more flayed as compared to that of the Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*). The Eastern Steppe Eagle (*Aquila rapax nipalensis*) has a tail whose outer edges are almost parallel. The Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax vindhiana*) has a well-rounded tail. The Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) has a tail which is almost square-ended though it is not as "parallel" as that of the Steppe Eagle.

Going for the Heads

The nostril is round and the gape ends just underneath the eye in the Lesser Spotted Eagle. The nostril is round but the

gape ends just before the eye in the Greater Spotted Eagle. The Tawny Eagle's gape ends just beneath the eye. The gape of the Imperial Eagle, although quite narrow, ends beyond the position of the eye. The Steppe Eagle sports a wide gape that ends beyond the eye.

Sizing up the Wings

There are seven primaries in the Greater Spotted Eagle and six primaries in the Lesser Spotted Eagle. Watch out for the tapering wing of the Steppe Eagle. You will even find a triangular window with white or markings. The wing of the Imperial Eagle is relatively broader.

The Jizz of Other Raptors

Long wings and long tails typify the Harriers (Genus *Circus*). Harriers are generally slender. Buzzards (Genus *Buteo*) have wings that are long and very broad. Their tails are very broad and slightly rounded at the end. Hawks (Genus *Accipiter*) possess short, rounded wings and long tail. Kites (Genus *Milvus*) are hawks with long, forked tails. Falcons (Genus *Falco*) are smaller than kites and have long, angular, pointed wings, with a relatively short tail. Vultures (Genus *Gyps*) have very large, broad, almost rectangular wings and square or slightly rounded tails. Other vultures (Genus *Neophron*) have long, narrow, pointed wings and a wedge-shaped tail. The Egyptian or Scavenger Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus percnopterus*) is an example.

Perhaps the time has come for each one of us to take a leaf out of Raajeev Mathew's feathery book to start drawing the jizz of birds of prey. A report about a presentation on field ID keys to raptors can at best be sketchy. But, one hopes that while referring to these sketches by Raajeev Mathew, you will prepare your own too.

So, here's wishing that your spirits soar while you mark time with the shapes and sizes of birds of prey on the fly. May the thrill of ID-ing them pat be yours today and always. What's more, it's "heads" you win, "tails" I lose if you can make head or tail of this BOP Smart ID Challenge! Wonder how much more win-win BOP birding can get?

WHERE HAVE THE SPARROWS GONE -

Some Thoughts

Humayun Taher

An article in the Times of India of Wednesday, 20th August 2003, regarding the disappearance of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) from the environs of the city has produced a bountiful harvest. We have received lots of letters, through email, from people of all walks of life, and all eager to share their thoughts on the problem, or telling us about small populations of Sparrows from their immediate area. One gentleman has informed us about a pair breeding near his house – another has shown concern about the large number of birds he has seen being sold at the Chowk Bird Market. Yet another has suggested a captive breeding programme to try and build up the population. Interesting, and useful as these observations are,

there is yet another aspect to them – the fact that lots of people (not necessarily concerned with bird conservation) have started to observe and show concern over the fact that House Sparrows are in danger of disappearing. This puts heart in an old birdwatcher like myself that perhaps there is some chance to get together and do something about the problem.

I remember my own childhood – we lived in a large and rambling old house in Banjara Hills, and the garden pool was a regular drinking place for dozens of the chirping critters. And it is interesting to note that, at that time, it was far more common to hurl anathemas at the birds for pecking grain, than trying to save them from extinction. If the cook had had her way in those days, it couldn't be worse than the fate which the Sparrows are facing today!

Another page from memory's book – the number of Sparrows was so large, (in circa 1976) that we youngsters devised a plan to imprison some of them! (I think we had heard that they make good eating!!). To that end a wire cage was liberally baited with grain and a cunning arrangement of strings was arranged from the door of the cage to the person in hiding. Although the idea was ingenious, the birds were not having any – they hopped into the cage, grabbed the grain and hopped out again with every expression of satisfaction – while the hidden *havaladar* tried in vain to make the cage door close! To no avail – the string had broken, or had snagged somewhere or something. Suffice to say that all the sparrows had a hearty feed and topped it up with a bath in the aforementioned pond and continued their nefarious activities on the grain which the cook had spread on a cloth to dry, inviting further anathemas, as before!

From that picture to the one today – it's been more than a month since I saw a Sparrow. And that was not in the city – it happened in Godavarikhani, at the Singareni Collieries Guesthouse. I saw a plump little bird sitting on a small Ashoka tree nearby and recognised it immediately. And I was amazed – because I recognised it at once in spite of the fact that it had been many a long day since I had seen one. It was a male House Sparrow, one of three hopping around, accompanied by their four wives. They made a very happy little band of birds and they can never have known that the mad human who prowled around the garden following their antics was as fascinated by them as they were by him (or his antics)!

Briefly then, it all boils down to this – that House Sparrows are presently in grave danger of disappearing from the face of the earth unless something is done, and done very quickly to save them and give them another chance at survival. Perhaps the article in the Times of India has done something in this direction – at least to the extent that it has brought to light several people interested in this cause and willing to devote time to the problem and find a possible solution. Anyone else out there who wants to come in...?

Below is a summarization of some of the letters received and mentioned above:

- 1) Mr. Viswanath Aisola writes that he is visited by 4 to 5 House Sparrows daily at a feeding bowl he has placed in his garden in Trimulgherry.
- 2) Mr. Jayaram Surrender writes of his sighting of a flock of the birds in Coorg. He also feels strongly that a captive breeding/research programme should be initiated, with participation from Universities for the research aspect. (A good idea this, can anyone suggest a university/location for the captive breeding programme?).
- 3) Mr. Mazher Ali also cannot remember when last he has seen them in the city, but tells of a sighting from Moinabad.
- 4) Mrs. Lakshmi Krishnan, a BSAP member has given us a sighting of 6 birds on 6th and 7th of August. She also has promised to look out for the nests if they can be found and to keep an eye on them.
- 5) Mr. Fazal Ali Adil has mentioned seeing two pairs of the birds from the area between Mehdiapatnam and Toli Chowki. He adds that one pair has disappeared, but one pair is nesting opposite his house and, from the signs, has raised a family. He shows great concern about the number of birds he has seen on sale at the Chowk market.

Perhaps, using these very concerned people as a nucleus, we can start some sort of campaign to pull the House Sparrow out of the hole it seems to have fallen into. What is urgently needed at the moment is to find out WHY the birds are declining so drastically. Theories are all very well; but facts are required here. Anyone listening...?

Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh – Final Notice dated 1st September 2003

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on 15th September 2003 (15.09.2003) at Vidyaranya High School, Saifabad. The timing of the meeting is 6.00 p.m. All members are requested to attend. The tentative programme for the meeting is given below:

- 1) President's Report
- 2) Secretary's Report
- 3) Treasurer's Report
- 4) Proposed Changes to the Constitution
- 5) Appointment of Auditors
- 6) Election of Executive Committee Members (Members desirous of serving on the committee, please give their names to the Hon. Secretary)
- 7) Any other Business

BIRDWORD PUZZLE - No. 5

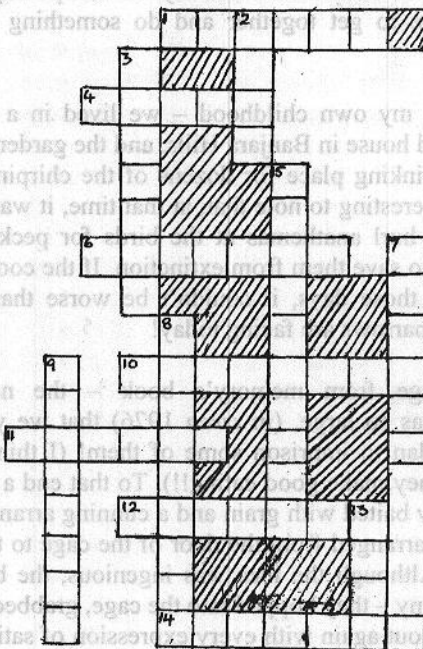
By M.M. Ali Khan

Note: Figures in Brackets denote number of alphabets

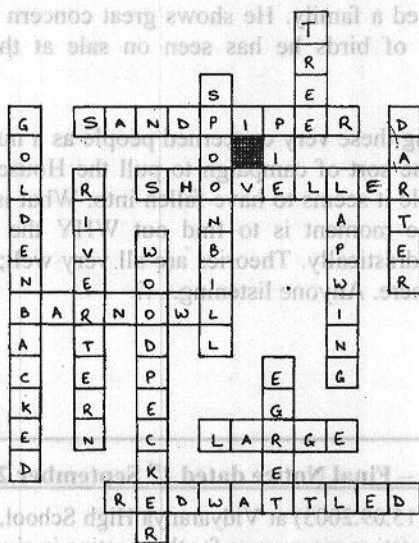
The puzzle contains bird names only

Correct solution to this puzzle will be given in the next issue of PITTA

1. Somewhere in Margo's prey (6).
2. See (4).
3. See (4).
- 4, 2 & 3. Digital Pager Wale (5, 4, 7)
5. Home to 'pearls' before a detective agency (10).
6. See (9).
7. Gives its young for adoption (6).
8. CROON in TIME otherwise to get the bird (9).
- 9 & 6. O'Hara - a little animal lover (7, 7).
10. Dress your hair and Duck (8).
11. Where you save cash and join MANY (8).
12. Crick between head and body (7).
13. Flightless bird (4).
14. Baked large but not to eat (7).



Members are requested to send their solutions to PITTA at the Society address. The correct entries will be entered for a draw. The lucky winner receives a BSAP cap, donated by Mr. M.M. Ali Khan.

Solution to Birdword Puzzle - No. 4**AN EXPENSIVE SHOT!**

A California man was fined \$20,000 and sentenced to five years probation for shooting a California Condor, the rare bird that has been on the endangered species list since the 1960's. Cole Lewis - who pleaded guilty in May to killing the condor after an extensive investigation - was also barred from hunting in the U.S.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

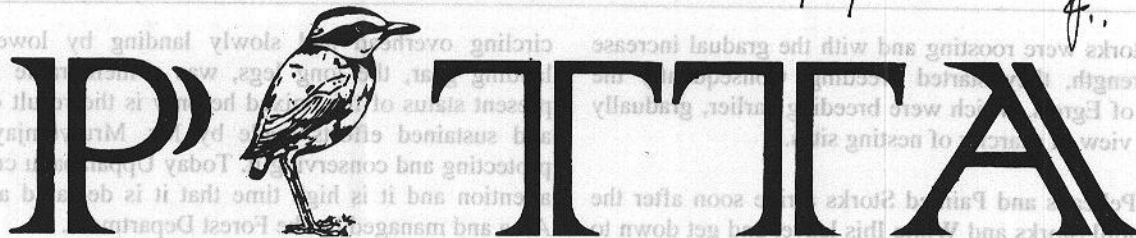
Editors: Siraj A. Taher & Humayun Taher (55612608), Raajeev Mathew (23310721)

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Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques

Recd 5/11/2003

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Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 150-151: October-November 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 23-xi-2003: Narsapur Reserved Forest, Medak District: Route: Fatehnagar – Balanagar – Dundigal. Members are requested to reach the destination by 6.45am. This will be a full-day trip. Carry water and lunch. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 17-xi-2003, 6pm: AVP by Humayun Taher on order level identification of swimming waterbirds and raptors. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 15th September 2003 at Vidyaranya High School. The agenda for the meeting was

- Inaugural address by the President.
- Presentation of Annual Report by Hon. Secretary.
- Presentation of Accounts for 2002-2003 by Hon. Treasurer
- Proposed changes to the Rules and Regulations of the Society.
- Appointment of auditors for the next year and fixing their remuneration.
- Election of Executive Committee Members.

Members would recollect that the proposed changes to the Rules and Regulations had been circulated with the previous issue of PITTA. These changes were proposed and accepted and incorporated with the existing rules and regulations of the society. The changes were proposed by Mr. P. Janardhan Reddy and seconded by Dr. S. Tej Kumar.

The accounts of the Society were presented by the Hon. Treasurer; they are reproduced in this issue of PITTA.

Apart from the business, BSAP member Suhel Quader gave a talk on Nesting and Mating Decisions and their Consequences in the Baya Weaverbird, which formed part of the theme of his PhD. Dissertation.

The meeting ended with the vote of thanks proposed by Raajeev Mathew.

Uppalapadu - An Avian Refuge

By S. Askok Kumar

Uppalapadu (16°18' N and 80°29' E), an avian refuge on the eastern coast hosts 35 species of resident and migratory birds. It is a wetland with a difference in that it has perennial and adequate supply of water in all the seasons being fed by Guntur Channel.

Located 7 km. from Guntur on Guntur-Tenali road, via Nadivelugu in Pedakakani mandal, Uppalapadu village has a population of 9000, with 1500 households. It has a Panchayat Office, Veterinary dispensary, Zilla Parishad High School and protected water supply.

This unique habitat came into prominence as a result of pioneering efforts of Mr. K. Mrutyumjaya Rao, Hony. Wildlife Warden during the last 13 years. Working in close cooperation and collaboration with the Gram Panchayat, People's representatives, village youth and elders, Forest Department, Tourism Development Corporation and the District administration, he succeeded in forming an exclusive zone of six acres of the village tank for bird habitat.

The vegetation preferred by the birds is the profuse growth of Mesquite trees (*Prosopis juliflora*) which forms the core nesting and breeding area in both the seasons.

After the first pre-monsoon showers, Asian Openbill Storks, White Ibis and Black-crowned Night Herons start arriving and soon after, they get busy in nest building and breeding. They desert the wetland during October/November when the juveniles are able to fly. Earlier small groups of Asian

Openbill Storks were roosting and with the gradual increase in their strength, they started breeding. Consequently the population of Egrets, which were breeding earlier, gradually declined in view of scarcity of nesting sites.

Spotbilled Pelicans and Painted Storks arrive soon after the Asian Openbill Storks and White Ibis leave, and get down to the serious business of nest building and breeding. They leave the habitat during February/March. During 2001 when the Spotbilled Pelicans arrived early, the Asian Openbill Storks were elbowed out. Consequently the juvenile birds which moved into the surrounding fields became sitting ducks to the village dogs. Some of them are reported to have died of starvation. Darters started breeding only during this year (2003). Glossy Ibis however, do not breed but roost along with the White Ibis.

In a majority of trees, top and middle layers are occupied by Asian Openbill Storks while the lower layers are occupied by White Ibis. In the Mesquite trees at the extreme end, Black-crowned Night Herons and their juveniles occupied the middle and lower layers while the Asian Openbilled Storks occupied the penthouse! In another tree, Darters and their chicks had occupied the middle layer with the Openbilled Storks on the top and White Ibis on the lower branches.

The nests are built precariously close to each other. So much so, that the nestlings were huddled close together elbow to elbow; brushing, jostling and flapping in view of the limited space. Consequently the waterbody is highly crowded and congested and, considering the number of birds that it supports at any one time, its carrying capacity is amazing. That the limited nest site is shared by different species simply by variation in the breeding period connotes resource partitioning among the water birds.

The conservation work taken up by the Forest Department with the funds provided by the Tourism Development Corporation are: (1) Construction of an earthen partition bund under Neeru-Meeru programme which separates the exclusive zone, (2) Laying of eight different earthen mounds of six feet high within the bird habitat to a length of 190 metres for growing the preferred vegetation, (3) Fencing of the zone with chain link mesh fence to a length of 200 metres, (4) An approach to the habitat from the main road with two culverts has been laid with Millingtonia as avenue trees, (5) At the entrance of the approach road, a hoarding depicting the birds of the habitat has been erected.

During 2002 four poachers from Vijayawada were caught with 20 birds by the villagers and the forest guards and handed over to the Forest Department. During September 2003, an injured Spotbilled Pelican was recovered by Forest Guards at Kakarlapalem near Bapatla. It was brought to Guntur where the Divisional Forest Officer made immediate arrangements for its treatment and released it in Uppalapadu habitat.

Wave after wave of Asian Openbill Storks, White Ibis and Glossy Ibis like bombers during the Second World War arriving at dusk silhouetted against the scarlet-blue sky,

circling overhead and slowly landing by lowering their landing gear, the long legs, was a memorable sight. The present status of this mixed heronry is the result of untiring and sustained efforts made by Mr. Mrutyumjaya Rao in protecting and conserving it. Today Uppalapadu cries out for attention and it is high time that it is declared a Protected Area and managed by the Forest Department.

BSAP Workshop on How To Study Birds

BSAP member Dr. Suhel Quader conducted a seminar on How to Study Birds – an Introduction for Amateur Birders, for BSAP members at the KBR National Park on 28th September 2003. The topics presented were: (i) Studying the Behaviour of Individuals, (ii) Studying Populations and (iii) Conducting Surveys for Birds. Participants learnt various techniques for studying bird behaviour and populations; techniques used for collection of important data on birds and how to summarise, analyse and present the data so gathered. At the end of each module were suggested some possible projects which could be taken up as an interesting aspect of our monthly birding activities.

The workshop was well attended by 33 members and the contents and topics were welcome and interesting. The field work was interesting and entertaining and the members were shown that the gathering of data regarding bird behaviour and populations need not interfere with the normal birdwatching activities which the members perform on all their field trips. The gathering of this data could be merely an extension of the birdwatching activity itself.

The workshop was a half-day affair and the members were most interested in the techniques which Suhel presented. It remains to be seen how many of these techniques will actually be put into practice at the next field trip. An interesting sideline of the field exercises, which involved the use of stopwatches, showed that a cellular phone (some of which carried stopwatches as part of their menu options) could be a useful addition to the birdwatcher's bag!

All in all, interesting points were discussed and presented and I personally feel that this workshop paved the way for us to do far more meaningful work towards understanding the ornithology of the state without in any way reflecting on the amount of fun we have out in the field. Fun added to data collection! How many followers...?

Bird of the Month *Redvented Bulbul*

We introduce a new activity for our members from this issue of the Pitta. Every month, we will designate a 'bird of the month'. We encourage members to pay particular attention to this species during this time. Please take notes on this species, and send in a compilation of observations to the editors towards the end of the month. We will publish a brief summary of your observations in the next Pitta, and all compiled observations

will be printed and displayed in the Society's reading room for everyone to read.

What should you take notes on? Any observations are welcome, including information on breeding (please don't disturb nests!), habitat, food, song, displays, or numbers of birds in your locality. Remember to note the date, time, and location of all observations.

Each bird of the month will be a common and easily identifiable species - this month's species is the Redvented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*). Suggestions for future months are welcome. Please do participate in this. All the notes you send in will be very valuable - information on even the commonest Indian birds is woefully incomplete.

Books & Journals received

The BSAP reading room received the following books and journals/periodicals during August and September 2003.

Books

1. Wild Orissa (2003): Tigers on the brink. An Orissa story. Wild Orissa. Bhubaneswar. [Donated by the authors.].
2. Ali, Salim (1955): The book of Indian birds, 5th (New) Revised and enlarged edition. The Bombay Natural History Society. Bombay. [Donated by Kevan Bundell.].

Journals / Periodicals

1. *Birdwatchers' Digest*. Vol. 25. No. 6. July/August 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
2. *Channel* 6. August & September 2003. [Subscription copy.].
3. *Conservation Biology*. Vol. 17. No. 4. August 2003. [Donated by ATree Foundation.].
4. *Conservation & Society*. Vol. 1. No. 1. January-June 2003. [Donated by ATree Foundation.].
5. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 11. No. 18. February 15, 2003. [Donated by Dorabji Tata Trust.].
6. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 3. June 30, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
7. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 4. July 15, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
8. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 5. July 31, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
9. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 6. August 15, 2003. (With *Gobar Times*.) [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
10. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 7. August 31, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
11. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 8. September 15, 2003. (With *Gobar Times*.) [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
12. *Down to Earth*. Vol. 12. No. 9. September 30, 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].
13. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. Vol. 100. No. 1. April 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].

14. *Hornbill*. April-June 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].

15. *Protected Area Update*. No. 44. August 2003. [Donated by Aasheesh Pittie.].

16. *Samsad News*. Vol. 21. No. 7. July 2003. [Exchange copy.].

17. *Samsad News*. Vol. 21. No. 8. August 2003. [Exchange copy.].

18. *Suara Enggang*. No. 4. July-August 2003. [Exchange copy.].

19. *Vihang*. Vol. 6. [Exchange copy.].

Rare petrel fights for survival

One of Europe's most endangered birds, Zino's petrel, has a slightly firmer grasp on survival than experts had previously thought.

Portuguese ornithologists have discovered a new breeding colony of the petrel in its mid-Atlantic fastness. They say this is significant because the petrel is the rarest bird to breed regularly in Europe. But fears persist over its ability to avoid extinction for much longer. The new colony, with 20 chicks and at least nine occupied nests, is the largest known. It was found on Pico do Areeiro, a peak in the central mountain massif of the Portuguese-administered island of Madeira.

Natural enemies

The new nest site is some way from the three known colonies; access to it has been closed until scientists can be sure how many chicks there are and what risk visitors may pose. Zino's petrel had been thought to number only 20-30 pairs, and is classed on the Red List compiled by IUCN-The World Conservation Union as critically endangered.

BirdLife International, a global alliance of conservation groups which works in more than 100 countries, says the species "continues to teeter on the brink of extinction". Although there are hopes of finding more breeding colonies, the petrel is under constant threat from rats and semi-wild cats which take its eggs and chicks, and from human pressures.

Defence threat

It prefers to nest in burrows on ledges inaccessible to people, but goats and sheep which reach them can trample the vegetation, and they are no protection against predators.

BirdLife's Portuguese partner, Spea, is also concerned about the possible impact of a Nato radar station which Portugal is planning to build near the summit of Pico do Areeiro. It is lobbying for the station to be built elsewhere. There are fears the fledglings could fly into the station's lights at night, and that radiation and construction work could both imperil the entire petrel population.

Zino's petrel is not in any case one of Nature's great survivors. In the last decade the colonies have averaged fewer than one fledgling per nest annually.

BIRDWATCHERS SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH

P.O. Box No. 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad - 500 034

Income and Expenditure Account for the Period 31.03.2003

Expenditure	Amount	Income	Amount
Advertisement	1,500.00	Subscriptions:	
Bank Charges	120.00	Ordinary	14,000.00
Camp Expenses	2,276.00	NRI	675.00
Internet	1,600.00	Student	1,120.00
Miscellaneous Expenses	1,099.00	Other Income:	
Purchase of T-shirts	11,000.00	Sales - Mayura Journal	1,880.00
Pitta Newsletter Printing	12,802.00	Sales - Pitta	150.00
Office Rent	22,000.00	Sales - T-Shirts	2,100.00
Postage and Telegraph	14,582.00	Admission Fee	3,225.00
Printing and Stationery	4,134.85	Bank Interest	10,749.74
IBA Project Expenses	14,606.00	Donation	5,330.00
SACON Project Expenses	20,483.50	Professional fees - IBA Project	48,200.00
		Miscellaneous Income	2,095.00
		Closing stock T-Shirts	9,460.00
		Deficit	(7,218.61)
	106,203.35		106,203.35

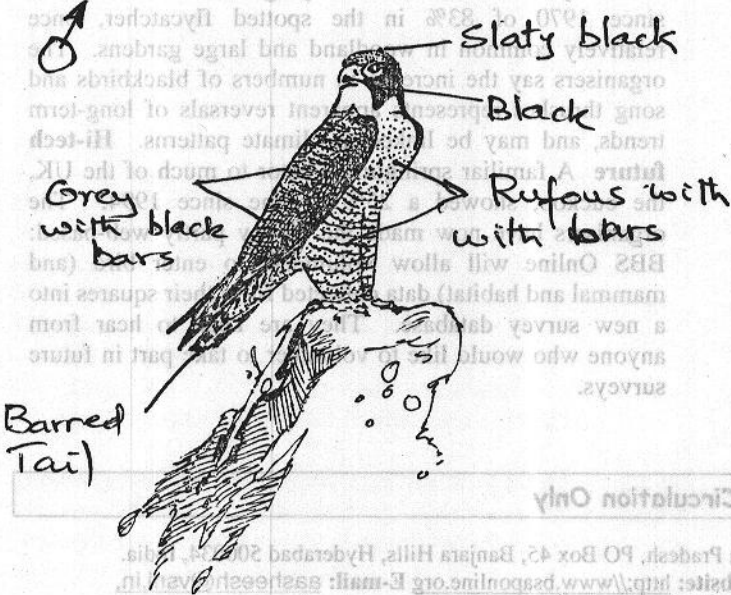
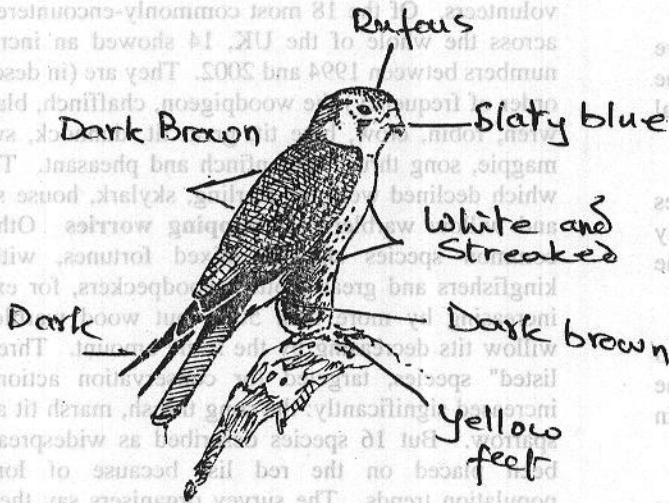
Balance Sheet as at 31.03.2003

Liabilities	Amount	Assets	Amount
Corpus Fund:		Fixed Assets:	
Opening Balance	216,598.63	Binoculars	4.00
Add: Life Membership Fees	29,000.00	Furniture	2,100.00
Less : Deficit	7,218.61	Slide Projector	1,000.00
	238,380.02	Telescope	1,000.00
Add : Corpus donations	59,878.13	Tripod	1,000.00
	298,258.15	Deposits:	
		Canara Bank - FDR	100,000.00
		HDFC - FDR	70,000.00
		Rent deposit - S. Krishnamurthy	6,000.00
		Advances:	
		Dr. Bhargavi Srinivasulu	394.00
		Cash in Hand	1,195.57
		Canara Bank	86,033.56
		HDFC Bank	15,418.02
		IT refund AY-2002-2003	7,650.00
		Closing Stock - T-Shirts	9,460.00
	298,258.15		298,258.15

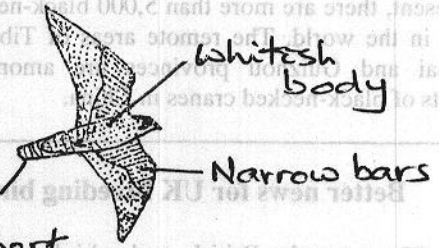
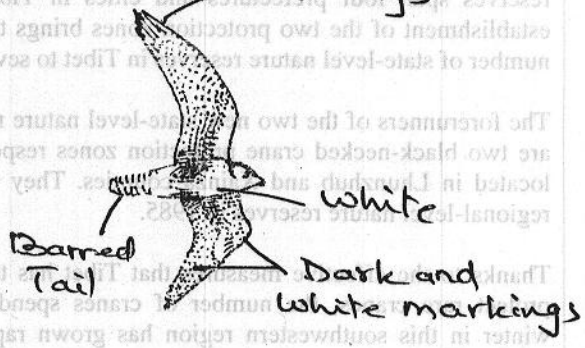
FIELD CRAFT By Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

LAGGAR FALCON

Jungle Crow + (43-46 cms)



Slim wings



Short tail



PEREGRINE FALCON

Jungle Crow + (40-48 cms)

Nature Reserves Granted to Protect Black-necked Cranes

China has granted two nature reserves in the Tibet Autonomous Region in its southwest the status of state-level protection zones to ensure the protection of the rare black-necked crane.

The valley along the middle reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River and the Senyingco nature reserve, two newly-created protection zones, are major habitats of rare cranes in Tibet.

Covering more than 8,000 square km, the two nature reserves span four prefectures and cities in Tibet. The establishment of the two protection zones brings the total number of state-level nature reserves in Tibet to seven.

The forerunners of the two new state-level nature reserves are two black-necked crane protection zones respectively located in Lhunzhub and Xainza counties. They became regional-level nature reserves in 1985.

Thanks to the effective measures that Tibet has taken to protect rare cranes, the number of cranes spending the winter in this southwestern region has grown rapidly in recent years.

Experts say that more than 1,600 black-necked cranes migrated to Lhunzhub County alone this past winter, compared with only 700 in 1992.

Biologists from China and the United States estimate that about 4,200 black-necked cranes spent this past winter in Tibet. Black-necked cranes usually stay in Tibet for about six months.

At present, there are more than 5,000 black-necked cranes living in the world. The remote areas of Tibet, Yunnan, Qinghai and Guizhou provinces are among the few habitats of black-necked cranes in China.

Better news for UK breeding birds

Many popular British garden birds have seen their fortunes improve over the last few years, a survey reveals. The 2002 breeding bird survey collected information on birds throughout the UK. Of the 105 species monitored across the country, 29 had declined

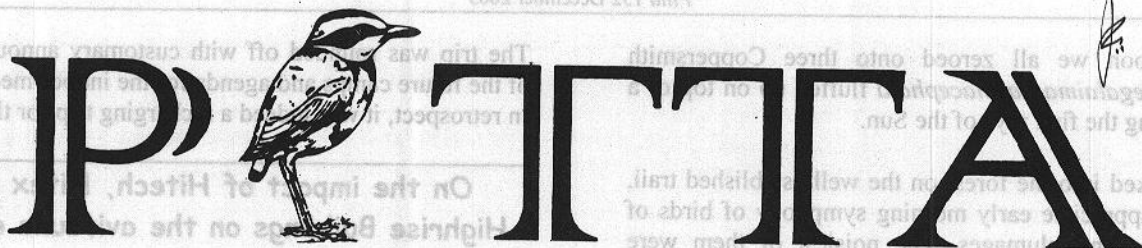
significantly since 1994, but 52 had registered significant increases. The government uses changes in breeding birds' status as an indicator of the UK's sustainable development. The survey, which began in 1994, is carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. **Popular survivors** Volunteer birdwatchers are given randomly-selected one-kilometre squares to visit three times in the season. Each of them spends about two hours early in the day counting all the birds they see and hear. In 2002, a total of 2,136 sites were surveyed across the UK by more than 1,700 volunteers. Of the 18 most commonly-encountered birds across the whole of the UK, 14 showed an increase in numbers between 1994 and 2002. They are (in descending order of frequency) the woodpigeon, chaffinch, blackbird, wren, robin, crow, blue tit, great tit, dunno, swallow, magpie, song thrush, greenfinch and pheasant. The four which declined were the starling, skylark, house sparrow and willow warbler. **Developing worries** Other less common species showed mixed fortunes, with both kingfishers and great spotted woodpeckers, for example, increasing by more than 50%, but wood warblers and willow tits decreasing by the same amount. Three "red-listed" species, targeted for conservation action, have increased significantly: the song thrush, marsh tit and tree sparrow. But 16 species described as widespread have been placed on the red list because of long-term population trends. The survey organisers say their most worrying finding is probably the decline of the willow tit, whose numbers fell by 72%. **Regional puzzle** They are also concerned about the large decline in south-east England of the house sparrow, down by 28% across the region and by 71% in London. Yet in some other parts of England sparrow numbers are stable or even increasing, while in Scotland the species increased by 29% and in Wales by 63%. Another worrying trend is the decline since 1970 of 83% in the spotted flycatcher, once relatively common in woodland and large gardens. The organisers say the increase in numbers of blackbirds and song thrushes represents apparent reversals of long-term trends, and may be linked to climate patterns. **Hi-tech future** A familiar springtime visitor to much of the UK, the cuckoo, showed a 25% decline since 1994. The organisers have now made the survey partly web-based: BBS Online will allow volunteers to enter bird (and mammal and habitat) data collected from their squares into a new survey database. They are keen to hear from anyone who would like to volunteer to take part in future surveys.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Siraj A. Taher & Humayun Taher (55612608) Website: <http://www.bsaponline.org> E-mail: aasheesh@vsnl.in, humayun5@rediffmail.com

Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 152: December 2003

Donations to the Society are exempt from tax u/s 80G(5)(vi) of I.T. Act, 1961.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (23353098) or Siraj Taher (55612608). Seats may be available in members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 21-xii-2003: Rourial Tank, Rangareddi District: Route: Charminar – Barkas – Pahadi Shareef. After 12 – 13 km., take the first left turn after Pahadi Shareef and drive on for 5 km. to the tank, which is on the right side of the road. Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.15 - 7.30am. Should be lots of migrants around, particularly the waterbirds. Added attractions are Crested Honey Buzzards which used to nest near the lake. There should be lots of ducks around, maybe even a few Barheaded Geese. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water. For further information contact Siraj Taher (55612608) or Shafaat Ulla (23353098) before 11am or after 4pm.

INDOOR MEETING: 15-xii-2002, 6pm: Vidyaranya High School, Opp. Secretariat, Saifabad. (Members are requested to please make a note of the date of the Indoor meetings and make efforts to attend in numbers).

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP Field Trip to Narsapur Reserve Forest, Sunday, 23.xi.2003

By Kiran Katikaneni

Sometimes all that it is needed to rediscover oneself is a quiet solitude and more preferable it is if in the nature's lap. This is what I had been looking forward to with great anticipation in the fag end of November. Our tryst with Narsapur is usually scheduled in the early winter's pleasant and chill mornings though the sun is relentlessly 'biting.' In the background of losing Anantagiri Reserve Forest and K.B.R. National Park to the insensible grandiosities of the authorities in the name of the development, Narsapur Reserve Forest stands out as a beacon to the hapless millions of Hyderabadis stranded in the high seas of ecological disasters.

Narsapur Reserve Forest is one of the favorite birding refuges of mine and undoubtedly so to the other members. This comparatively medium sized wilderness area, a representative of dry deciduous forests of the Deccan has always given me few of my memorable birding experiences. How I still remember the unhurried undulating overhead flight of a Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker, *Dinopium benghalense*! The second limpid memory that I still cherish is that of a Gold-fronted Chloropsis, *Chloropsis aurifrons*, calling melodiously while mimicking its fellow inhabitants of the forest. The extreme difficulty experienced in stretching the neck and straining the sight was nothing but ephemeral once the bird was located.

Apart from my own souvenirs of the place, it is also those of other members that are very much integral to the bird lore of the Society. A couple of them to quote for their eternality are that of a joyful discord between two members over the identity of two *Dendrocopos* spp. Woodpeckers and a mutual scary rendezvous between a member and a Wildboar, *Sus scrofa*.

I had a particularly a pleasant surprise on the morning of Sunday, 23.xi.2003. Standing at the Panjagutta X roads, I looked up into the skies with a feeling of a Shikra being sighted. But to my delight it was a Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*, chasing two Blue Rock Pigeons, *Columba livia*. It flew straight into my line of vision offering me to appreciate its ferocity while hunting down its favorite prey. It gave me enough time to observe its diagnostic features of a thick moustachial stripe and comparatively a bulkier body. But alas, rest of the members could only observe it flying away into the horizon disappointedly more so for Prashant and Vinay, two of the enthusiastic 'Tiger Ambassadors' of Hyderabad, whose only ambition in life seemed to observe a Peregrine diving onto its prey. The second delightful surprise was that of seeing Vishnuvardhini, a classmate of mine all geared up for her maiden birding trip with boundless and infectious enthusiasm.

Our birding started as soon as we entered the reserve forest area, with ourselves dividing into four distinct sub-groups. The first bird to greet us was the ubiquitous White-browed Bulbul, *Pycnonotus luteolus* with its loud but melodious signature tune. It offered us one of its rarest public appearances and nobody was more happier than

Sheetal. Soon we all zeroed onto three Coppersmith Barbets, *Megalaima haemacephala* fluffed up on top of a tree profiting the first rays of the Sun.

As we walked into the forest on the well established trail, we could appreciate early morning symphony of birds of varied sizes and plumages. The noisiest of them were Rose-ringed Parakeets, *Psittacula krameri*, Red-vented Bulbuls, *Pycnonotus cafer* and Common Tailorbird, *Orthotomus sutorius*. On our way into the stream, some excessive bird activity particularly in one direction stopped us. On thorough observation we could spot a pair of Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher, *Hypothymis azurea*. A mesmerizing bird, indeed! Here we also sighted a flock of Small Minivets, *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* commuting between tree tops. The male members were easily observed thanks to their colour singling them out in the sun.

In the stream, now dried up in patches kids found out mutilated and burnt looking claws of a Crab. Nathan was sure of it's present state because of a bird though others seemed to have as varied opinions as possible. Here a quick and helpful ID lesson in differentiating Rose-ringed and Plum-headed Parakeets, *Psittacula cyanocephala* in flight proved quite handy as the kids jumped to name the bird each time they sighted or heard it.

At this point Nathan pointed to a small bird flirting through the foliage, up and down the trees. Only when it stabilized itself that it could be conclusively identified to be a Greenish Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochiloides*. Once out of the stream bed all of us sighted a noisy bird in pied plumage. Though it had all the required characteristics of a Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike, *Coracina melanoptera*, one major ID anomaly of having white wing-patch raised a suspicion of possible Ashy minivet, *P. divaricatus*. As our caravan proceeded deep into the forest, we were greeted by loud squealing of an Indian Grey Hornbill, *Ocyrceros birostris*, which seemed larger than it's usual size.

At this point of time, when the group was turning weary Sushil's assurance of sighting Woodpeckers rejuvenated us and led us onto a hillock. This occasion was used to have a quick bite and a bit of socializing. One of our young new debutantes was Deepti whose love for the woods drew her to the birding and then ultimately to birds. Saraswati an Anthropologist and a documentary film-maker working with various tribal groups talked about her experiences.

As the trip was drawing to a close, it was decided to head to the lake area as usual to sit in the cool shade and marvel at the waterbirds. But it was decided to have a quick tea break and thanks to the hospitality of an ENT surgeon in our group that we could have it in the comfort of his clinic. Here among the rocks nestled were two, possibly juvenile Asian Openbill-Stork, *Anastomus oscitans* in the company of various other birds.

The trip was rounded off with customary announcements of the future camps and agenda for the indoor meetings. In retrospect, it was indeed a recharging trip for the spirits.

On the impact of Hitech, Hitex and Highrise Buildings on the avifauna of the Deccan Rock Habitat in Hyderabad

By Bharat Bhushan

Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Cyberabad. There is growth and then, there is growth. I have been a visitor to the Cyberabad area during 27-29 November 2003 and previously during February 2002. Both times, to attend conferences and seminars and visit exhibitions at the National Academy of Construction (NAC) and HiTex Campus beyond the HiTech City at Cyberabad. The NAC is one of the major construction blocks in the Cyberabad area. There are many many more, including Shilparamam and the circular high-rise building known as HiTech City among various others.

I have also visited the NAC campus area prior to its construction. The entire region was typical Deccan Rock formations, most of them quite splendid to see for their diversity of structure. Several bird species sighted there were familiar, especially for a visitor from Pune. I vaguely remember that the pre-construction visit was during July 2000, in a scanty monsoon period. Sparsely spread out bushes, *Acacia* and *Zizyphus*. Some custard apple trees, possibly from random sprouting. The birds seen during that visit included a lone Shikra, common mynas, Indian robin, ashy-crowned finch larks, three little cormorants and a pond heron at a small pool at the site, grey partridge, a pair of redwattled lapwing, little brown dove, 2-3 small green bee-eaters, a lone roller, a lone rufoustailed finch-lark, two black Drongos and some Munia flocks at a distance. I still remember thinking to myself that there were no signs of any weaver-bird nests in the region. Hafeez Contractor, the well-known architect from Mumbai was to design the campus and everybody who was important was present.

Take another glance at the list of birds that I remember. Possibly I have left out some others that I may have seen that day. I do remember the birds that I did not see at the rock habitats. Shrikes, Babblers, Egrets, Crows, Pigeons and Sparrows. I remember very distinctly, that I did not see them at the site. The NAC campus was being planned, but the impact could be felt from the enormous construction taking place around the HiTech City area in Cyberabad. However, to be cautious, please remember that these are thoughts from a single day's visit.

Take yet another glance at the list of birds that I have listed. They are the most regularly seen birds in the Deccan. From Pune, to Solapur, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad to Medak and to Sangli, I have seen these birds in densely and sparsely constructed urban-rural areas. I was therefore

quite content to go with the ones that I saw that day at the to-be-constructed NAC campus.

Around February 2002, on an invitation from NAC, after the construction of the main building, I visited the campus, the Shilparamam areas, the newly constructed wide roads with its avenue and median plantations. For a repeat visitor to the city, all this construction and spread of urban conglomeration is very impressive. Moreover, when one hears all the talk of information technology, the passage to the 21st Century and the strides that the State has achieved in this momentum. The Shilparamam enclave, therefore, is absolutely splendid when you see what has been achieved in concrete, in greenery and in the vision that has gone into its planning. There is also this valley that is being shown as the wilderness patch within the enclave. This wilderness area is being very thoughtfully planned. However, one cannot but be worried. In the name of eco-tourism, wilderness planning, love for nature and whatever else, the valley has been equipped with electrification and flood-lighting.

That night, during one of the events of the seminar, the Hon. Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh met with the participants. Everybody felt proud and one could see a sense of achievement among the organizers and the visitors. The wilderness valley was well-lit from 7.00 pm and I presume, stayed that way right through midnight. What wilderness would this be? What would be the impact on the local birds? Were there any birds in the region or not? I went back the next day, enroute to NAC, and took a very quick recce in the valley. I did not hear a single bird. Not a single bulbul, not a single partridge. The habitat was splendid. There should have been a cacophony of bird sounds in that valley. None. Please remember, the wilderness valley is protected. Visitors are not allowed to wander around.

The same absence was felt in the NAC campus during the NAC Seminar in February 2002. I kept absconding from seminar sessions and wandering around the campus. Two large exhibition pavilions were being constructed. The large NAC main building and the administrative building had been constructed. The lawns were being planned. The rock formations were no longer present. And, the birds? None. I remember an interview given by the Late Dr. Salim Ali once, that there is no place where birds could not be seen. I can safely, almost safely say now, that there is such a place. The buildings are splendid. Very good achievements for human aspirations. Very good achievements for the city of Hyderabad. Very good for brick, concrete, grass and urban forestry.

I wandered outside the campus. New urban forestry boards had been placed along the roadside avenues. New one-year old saplings, from the look of them, had been planted. There were some mynas, a couple of black Drongos, bee-eaters, roller, one hoopoe and if I remember correctly, one purple sunbird. Again, please realise the absence of all the Deccan rock habitat birds. There should have been a longer list of birds. Most others, especially those

responsible for the construction and urban forestry would point out that there are a lot of birds to be seen in these areas. Maybe. Maybe I am correct, and maybe I am wrong. For, I am writing this from very brief visits. But I am not wrong about the lack of avian diversity and the numbers of individual birds per species. There was nothing to write about. Again, I now realise that I am wrong. For that absence of whatever to write about is what was worth writing about.

Now, in November 2003, the Exhibition halls in the NAC campus are fully constructed. Several people visit the campus to see the exhibitions. Students attend courses at NICMAR within the NAC campus. There is an autorickshaw stand outside the main gate. The NAC have desilted a waterbody in their campus to generate additional water storage capacity for their requirements. Again, the most distressing aspect. No birds. I invited Mr. Siraj Taher to accompany me to the campus and to abscond during the seminar sessions. We wandered around the exhibition halls. All exhibits were about urban environmental planning. Some institutions were exhibiting the use of geographical information systems, some were talking about monitoring water pollution. Some were asking the citizens of Hyderabad to visit Kanha. The urban forestry projects in Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam were shown. But, there were no birds outside the buildings. None in the campus. The lawns are looking pretty, well-watered. Some trees have grown. In the three days that I wandered around, looking specifically to spot birds, I saw only one common swallow that flew in low amidst the buildings for about 10 seconds and flew out almost immediately.

I would like to once again emphasise that these are the thoughts of a very vagrant birder, written entirely in order to request the members of the Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh to position a continual strategy to monitor the avian populations and their diversity in the urban forestry projects in the City and in Cyberabad. Please prove me wrong.

Review - Birds of Pune

In publishing the book 'Birds of Pune', Kalpvriksh and the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) have both lived up to their names - they have fulfilled our desire for a primer on birds! Intended as a handbook about all birds of Pune - resident birds, stragglers or occasional visitors - their publication is actually proving to be a handy book for all of us birding in India. Its unique key to birds makes for indulgent reading for everyone from pre-schoolers to Ph.D. scholars.

What bird could it be, now?

Picture this scenario. Budding birders venture outdoors with their binoculars only to find themselves scurrying to the nearest ready reference book for a more detailed description of that blur of colour, bill or tail afforded by the bins. Takes some considerable leafing through, surely?

But what if there is a made-to-order guide on birds of your area that classifies them in a most approachable and rapid manner – which is to say, by their immediately visible characteristics of colour and proportion? In this touch-button age, when you want all answers in a jiffy, what you need is just such an illustrated, ready reckoner to home in on a bird's identity. The learning process thus made more enjoyable for the beginner, would perhaps even set one off on more frequent bird watching trips. Pune certainly can boast of honouring its bird life with this thoughtfully brought out slim volume of 136 pages. Here, our feathery brethren are categorised by their general appearance and the localities they frequent. So you have the sunbird, kingfisher, crow pheasant and painted stork coming together under the umbrella of "brightly coloured birds." The house sparrow, sandpiper, Indian robin and marsh harrier find their place as "muted coloured birds." The Mahratta woodpecker, river tern, large pied wagtail, shikra and redwattled lapwing nestle together as "sober yet smart birds." The Blackwinged stilt, demoiselle crane and greater flamingo fall in step as "long-legged birds." The white ibis, Openbill stork and grey hornbill feature as "birds with prominent bills." The hoopoe and crested serpent eagle share their attributes under "crested birds." The peacock, pheasant-tailed jacana and Indian tree pie bring up the rear as "birds with trailing tails." While at first appearance, it may seem incongruous to group together such seemingly incompatible bedfellows as the pintail and the paradise flycatcher, 'Birds of Pune' serves its purpose in design and content as a user-oriented, learner-friendly guide to birds that is based on exactly that - first appearances! The budding birder is introduced right away to the bird that is most likely to be the one sighted, going by its most obvious aspect. Hopefully, this immediate gleaning of specific information helps spark the next round of observant birding.

The individual descriptions of birds include their scientific name, local name(s), relative size, resident or migratory status, field characteristics, general habits and habitats. In the book, you will read about the State Bird of Maharashtra, the yellowlegged green pigeon. So highly developed is its camouflage that you would not be able to spot a single bird in a dense canopy though there may be a couple of scores of these birds marking time up there! Thankfully, it is not a state secret that the state bird loves to eat figs. So now you know how to inveigle the yellowlegged green pigeon into revealing its presence – um, by presenting it some figs.

The Mahratta woodpecker, named after the valorous Marathas of the region, prefers to maintain a low profile, giving itself away only in flight or when diligently drilling into tree trunks for food. It inhabits light forest, scrubland and open woodland. The male of the species sports a daring combination of red crown and yellow forehead.

The majestic bearing of the demoiselle crane may be witnessed during the winter season at the reservoirs and lakes along the Pune-Satara road and the Pune-Solapur road. Overall grey in colour and with a black head and

neck offset by white ear tufts, the crane can be seen moving in groups, feeding by the lakeside.

The male of the ashycrowned finch-lark species sports a black underside and grey crown and the female is a dull brown. Lest you mistake the bird to be part of the stony terrain, it sets the record straight by its aerial display of curious dipping flights! The river tern is a resident bird that feeds on the fish of large rivers and inland water bodies. The crested serpent eagle may be sighted in the valleys of Sinhagad, Bhugaon and Katraj. The long legs and typical pink bill of the greater flamingo are a sight to behold. You are sure to sight migrant flocks of greater flamingos in early summer around the Ujani and Veer reservoirs. Watch out for all these birds while you are there.

A glance through the checklist of the birds of Pune district reveals an astounding variety of birds that are "locally common." The demoiselle crane, black bulbul, ashycrowned finch lark, river tern, greater flamingo, crested bunting, malabar whistling thrush, goldfronted chloropsis, whitenecked stork, lesser goldenbacked woodpecker, you name it and Pune is home to the bird. While the world wonders at the reasons for the house sparrow suddenly becoming a rarity, its 'abundant' status in the Pune neighbourhood is indeed a matter to ponder over. The crimsonbreasted barbet is 'common' and the Indian sandgrouse is 'locally common.' Scores of other birds in the area add up to make truly rich fare for the earnest bird watcher.

It's the birds that make the place. Increasingly, trees are being felled either for logging or for making way for roads and cables to reach our homes and offices. Electric pylons, no less, are being uprooted to make place for hoardings. So, if you suddenly find yourself sparing more than a thought for birds and their nesting facilities, you may take it that their story, as told through this book, has reached home.

If you are looking for the calls of birds though, they are not listed and notated here in a consistently thorough manner. While we are told that the rose-ringed parakeet makes a shrill 'keeah, keeah', we are not enlightened so about the house sparrow, baya weaver, spotted munia, grey tit and wagtail among others. You will have to be satisfied with descriptions such as 'trilling call', 'sweet whistling call notes', 'screeching calls' and similar phrases for most bird calls that find mention here. The inconsistent spelling of the word "accipiter" is the other thing that is likely to irk. Also, I would have liked to read something about each of the birds that are listed as 'locally common', say about the black bulbul, blackcapped blackbird, quaker babbler and grey necked bunting, but they find mention only in the checklist.

Embellishments

In many ways, reading the book is like walking the talk with an esteemed senior birder. It comes embellished with an index, a glossary, a tabular guide and a checklist of birds of Pune district. Besides, there are interesting nuggets about the location and travel information of the

birding grounds of Pune, along with maps that chart the area to a 'T.' You will want to straightaway visit Pashan Lake and Pune University which take pride of place owing to their accessibility. Other birding havens include the Bhimashankar Forest, Sinhagad Fort, Lonavala Khandala locale and the Mula Mutha Bird Sanctuary.

The publishers appear to have gone to great lengths to attract the reader. The font is readable, it is written in fowl-language, er... good English, the B & W illustrations of the birds are supplemented with ones in colour. In short, just what the birds of Pune ordered for us.

Investing in this informative guidebook is a smart choice. At the convenient-for-every-pocket 'contributory amount' of rupees fifty, I should now be saying "buy-buy, folks!" Here's the ordering information: Kalpvriksh, Apartment 5, Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune - 411 004. Maharashtra. Telephone and facsimile: 91-020-5654239. Email: kvriksh@vsnl.com [Payment mode: Cheque/M.O./DD. For outstation cheques, please add Rs.15/-]

Blue-Footed Booby (*Sula nebulosus*) A New Species for Indian Peninsula

A single Blue-footed Booby *Sula nebulosus* A. Milne-Edwards, 1882, was found near Pingaleshwar (Gujarat) by members of the Flamingo Nature Club on 3rd July 2003. The bird was sick and unable to fly. It died the next day. The specimen was sent to the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) for identification, which was confirmed. Photographs taken when it was alive, clearly show the blue coloured feet of the bird. The undersigned saw the beautifully prepared skin and the photographs in BNHS. This is a first record for the Indian sub-continent. Three species have been recorded earlier: Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* Lesson, 1831; *S. sula* (Linnaeus, 1766); *S. leucogaster* (Boddaert, 1783).

Society to Save Rocks - Children's Camp

The Society to Save Rocks proposes to conduct a Children's Camp on 11th January 2004, between 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. Activities at the camp will include (1) Rock Walk, (2) Birdwatching, (3) Snake Show and (4) Painting Competition. This will be followed by a Concert by Delhi band "Indian Ocean".

The venue for the camp will be at Durgam Cheruvu (Secret Lake), near Ambedkar Open University, Road No. 46, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad. Members, especially children, are requested to participate in this programme in numbers as this is an activity of a Non-Governmental Organisation in the city. Several BSAP members are also members of the Society to Save Rocks. For details contact: T. Vijayendar (Tel. No. 98482 - 56457) or Siraj Taher (Tel. No. 55612608).

Indoor Meeting of the Society on 17 Nov.

2003 - AVP by Humayun Taher on identification of swimming waterbirds and raptors.

By. Siraj A. Taher

The meeting, although very poorly attended, was an extremely interesting and informative one. Humayun, without going into too many details, took the members through the basic steps in identifying waterbirds (swimming species) and raptorial birds.

Giving Humayun some time for breaking his fast, the meeting started slightly later than usual. Unfortunately, the turnout of members was very disappointing, only 7 members turning up. This sort of thing needs to be addressed and members are requested to take note of the date of the indoor meetings and make serious attempts to attend the same. In particular, members should have attended this meeting because it was very interesting and informative.

Starting with birds which are usually encountered swimming in water and using a blackboard to illustrate the main points, Humayun quickly and very precisely highlighted the main points with respect to beak shapes, tail shapes, body shapes and general appearance to highlight the main distinguishing features of the various species of swimming birds. These included Ducks, Geese, Grebes, Gulls, Terns, Coots, Cormorants, Darters, Pelicans, Waterhens, Jacanas and Moorhens. There was no attempt on his part to explain the differences between Indian and Purple Moorhens. This was simply to categorize the birds into their species. Individual identification would have taken a couple of days to cover adequately and was quite outside the scope of the meeting, as was made clear at the outset itself.

In similar fashion, Humayun also covered the raptorial species, although in this section, he did elaborate on flight identification as well. The species covered here included Hawks, Eagles, Falcons, Hawk-Eagles, Harriers and Buzzards.

Personally, I was rather disappointed at the poor turnout, more so as I felt that the subject was extremely interesting and very well presented by the speaker. The spot sketches were excellent and very lucidly explained and the subject was well covered and admirably presented. This would have been an excellent opportunity for some of our new members to become better acquainted with bird identification.

We have hopes of trying to organize this lecture again, preferably when the turnout is much better, so as to enable members to take advantage of the identification points presented by Humayun in his talk. We will try to do so at as early a date as possible. Hopefully, that occasion will be better attended than this one was.

SPOTLIGHT - EURASIAN HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*) By Siraj A. Taher

At a glance when in flight, one could easily mistake it for a Peregrine Falcon, but on closer scrutiny, it is smaller and has different markings. The Hobby has rufous thighs and undertail coverts, and the smaller moustachial stripes are more pointed. In the male, the upper plumage is slaty grey and it has a blackish head. The breast and underbelly are rusty white, with broad black streaks. Females have browner upperparts than males. Juveniles have dark brown upperparts and pale buff underparts, which are more heavily streaked, and pale thighs.

Two races are recognised in the region, *Falco subbuteo subbuteo* and *Falco subbuteo centralasiæ*. The nominate race is a winter migrant to Pakistan, Baluchistan, Northwest Frontier Province and Punjab, and in India south upto Karnataka. Also to Nepal and Bangladesh. The other race (*F. s. centralasiæ*) is partially resident in the Himalayas in Kashmir, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. Mainly it is also an Extralimital winter visitor from September to April fairly evenly spread out over Pakistan (Sind, Baluchistan and Punjab), and to India East through Assam and Manipur and Bangladesh West upto Gujarat and South Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It is not found in Sri Lanka. The races overlap in some parts of their distribution, especially in Pakistan, Punjab, Kashmir and Nepal; and are not clearly separable in the field.

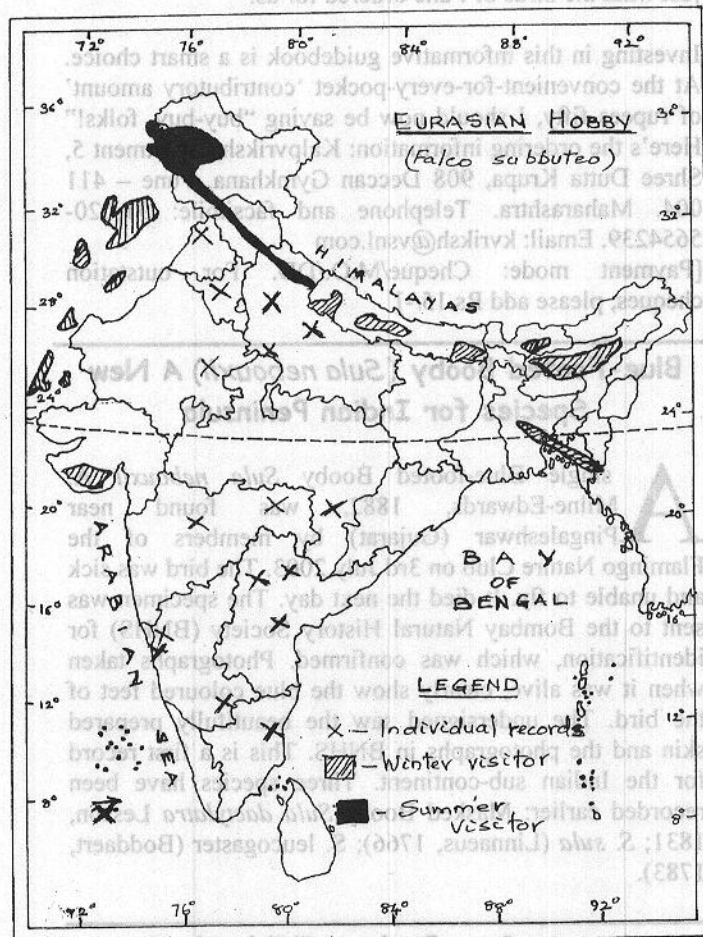
While the Extralimital distribution of the nominate race is from Scandinavia and North Austria to Siberia and South to the Mediterranean, upto Africa and East to North-West China and Mongolia. The Extralimital distribution of the Eurasian race has been found breeding from Turkey to Northern Iran.

In India the Eurasian race is found to be very sparsely distributed almost all over India from Kashmir in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south, and from Gujarat in the west to Assam and Manipur in the east.

The Hobby is a bird of well-wooded country, and especially likes swampy areas. Active almost always at dusk and dawn, (crepuscular), the bird has a strong, swift and undulating flight, sometimes in circles and sometimes gliding. Occasionally it hovers when it sights a small bird, a cicada or a locust. Sometimes it is seen catching swifts and warblers on the wing and taking them to a perch to eat. It has also been observed to hawk for winged insects, in small flocks of 8 to 10 birds. The principal food of this falcon consists of small birds like larks, pipits, swallows, swifts or warblers, pipistrelle bats and large flying insects. Very bold birds, both races of the Hobby were once used as hawking birds by falconers.

The Eurasian Hobby breeds in the Himalayas, from 1800m. to 5000m. in Tibet and also in Nepal from May to

July. Usually the nest is an old nest of the crows, magpies, herons or rooks in a tall tree near a ledge. 3 to 4 dull yellowish-buff eggs, speckled and spotted with brick-red blotches are laid. The incubation period is 28 days and both parents take part in the incubation and care of the young.



The historical records of its distribution are from Jalna (Maharashtra), Shimla (U.P.), Kashmir and Punjab. Very few recent records of the Eurasian Hobby are available in India and, as such, proper studies are impossible as to their status and distribution. Any data made available to either the Bombay Natural History Society (B.N.H.S.) or the BSAP would help immensely. Maybe there is data available in Europe or in other places where this falcon is found and has been studied, but about this very little is known.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes notes in brief telegraphic form, from Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on threatened birds are also welcome. Their status ** follows BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened Birds of Asia*. English names, sequence and scientific nomenclature follow Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised English and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i-viii, 1-36. Unless specified, all observations are for 2003. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see Pitta # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

KRISHNA DISTRICT (Kiran Katikaneni)

Vijayawada: N.T.R. University of Health Sciences

24.vii: CHESTNUT BITTERN 5; BLACK BITTERN

Vijayawada city: Kanaka Durga Temple

24.vii: BARN OWL CB, 1 N-hole in main entrance gopuram. A constant, harsh screeching from within stopped when an ad., landed (after 20min.) and did not exit for another 10.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hayathnagar, Torrur village (Kiran Katikaneni)

30.x: GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 1.

Indira Park

15.viii (Kiran Katikaneni & Oddur Ingolfsson): PURPLE SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm.

Kanchan Bagh (Kiran Katikaneni)

24.ix: DUSKY CRAG-MARTIN CB, 2 yng., being fed by ad., on 7th floor window ledge.

Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park (Kiran Katikaneni, Karuna Shah, Imran Siddique, Ravi, Mr. & Mrs. Rakesh, Nikhil, Prashanth, Poorva & Vinay)

20.vii: INDIAN PLAINTIVE CUCKOO hrd; RED-VENTED BULBUL PRB, 1 N under-const.

Mahaveer Harin Vanasthali

21.viii (Kiran Katikaneni & Imran Siddiqui): BLACK-SHOULDERED WOODPECKER.

24.viii (Kiran Katikaneni, Shafaat Ulla, Shobha, others): INDIAN PEA FOWL CB, 1 N with 4 large, oval, white eggs, on cleared, mildly scraped ground, concealed in undergrowth; BLACK-SHOULDERED WOODPECKER hrd.

27.ix (Kiran Katikaneni): EGYPTIAN VULTURE 1 ad.

Mansoorabad (Kiran Katikaneni)

6.viii: INDIAN PLAINTIVE CUCKOO.

9-12.ix: STONE-CURLEW hrd daily from Mahaveer Harin Vanasthali; BRAINFEVER BIRD hrd.; COMMON INDIAN NIGHTJAR hrd.; SMALL BEE-EATER 60+ perch on overhead wires and Neem *Azadirachta indica* at hunt flying insects late into dusk.

14.ix: EGYPTIAN VULTURE 1; BLACK DRONGO CB, a pair with a fledgeling; HOUSE SPARROW; BAYA WEAVER CB, a colony on neem tree, overhanging a deep well; 6 N occupied, 3 N under-const.

Sanjeevaiah Park

15.viii (Kiran Katikaneni & Oddur Ingolfsson): BLACK DRONGO CB, 1 fledgeling with ad.; HOUSE CROW CB, 10 N.

Uppal, Peerzadiguda village (Kiran Katikaneni)

02.xi: VULTURES 6 unidentified; MARSH SANDPIPER; COMMON GREENSHANK 50.

KHAMMAM DISTRICT

Manuguru

16.vii (Kiran Katikaneni): ASIAN PIED STARLING CB, 3 N, 1 on electricity pole, in open-cast mine; BLACK DRONGO CB, 1 N on electricity pole, in open-cast mine.

Kothagudem, Rudrapur

15.vii (Kiran Katikaneni & Aruna Murthy): ASIAN PIED STARLING CB, 4 N; WHITE-THROATED MUNIA CB, 1 N.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus

15.viii (Kiran Katikaneni & Oddur Ingolfsson): LITTLE GREBE CB, 2 N; BLACK IBIS 20; EGYPTIAN VULTURE 1 imm.; BAYA WEAVER CB, 5 colonies of which 1 with 57 N; COMMON MYNA N.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Moinabad

17.viii (Kiran Katikaneni): BONELLI'S EAGLE CB, 1 pair with 1 juv.

Shameerpet Deer Park (a.k.a. Jawahar Deer Park)

21.ix (Kiran Katikaneni, Shafaat Ulla, MS Kulkarni, Suhel Quader, others): PAINTED SPURFOWL 1 M; COMMON IORA POB, 1 M in br. plm.

Yadagirigutta

22.xi (Pranay Rao): PINTAIL 150+; BLACK IBIS 6; COOTS 3

KERALA

KANNUR DISTRICT

Kattampally (Sashikumar C)

23.ix: WESTERN MARSH-HARRIER 6; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 2; OSPREY 1.

9-10.x: WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN POB 1 in br. plm.

KOTTAYAM DISTRICT

Vembanad Lake

21.ix (Prasanth Narayanan & Deepu): EURASIAN SPOONBILL 7.

25.ix (Manu P M): ORIENTAL WHITE IBIS 25.

15.x (Sajith & Ajay): GLOSSY IBIS 650+.

28.x (KV Eldhose): SHOVELLER 1.

5.xi (Manu PM): STEPPE EAGLE 1 juv.; BOOTED EAGLE 1.

7.xi (Manu PM): WESTERN MARSH-HARRIER 3; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 7.

11.xi (Manu PM): EASTERN MARSH-HARRIER 1; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 2; STEPPE EAGLE 1 IMM.

THRISSUR DISTRICT

Kole wetlands

5.x (Sreenivasan PP & PO Nameer): ASIAN OPENBILL-STORK 75; BAR-TAILED GODWIT 22; MARSH SANDPIPER 10.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; c-approximately; CB-confirmed breeding; CD*-conservation dependent; const-construction/ing; CR*-critical; DD*-data deficient; disp-display/ing; EN*-endangered; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; NT*-near threatened; OH-overhead; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tik-Taluk; vil-village; VU*-vulnerable; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Delhi: Suresh Chand Sharma; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Suresh Chand Sharma; Karnataka: S. Subramanya; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CHODAVARAM HERONRY

By S. Ashok Kumar & S. Balaram

Fleeting glimpses of vast stretches of luscious green carpets of paddy fields hemmed by Palmyra palm trees and interspersed by towering coconut groves feasted our eyes while cruising along NH No. 7 on 5th September 2003 in West Godavari district. With the monsoon clouds floating overhead, the weather was pleasant. After covering a distance of 66 kms. Chodavaram village name board greeted us. It is a typical coastal village consisting of a single main road with scattered habitations on either side, bylanes with tiled houses beyond which are the agricultural lands dotted with Palmyra trees.

Chodavaram village (31°E and 17°N) has two panchayats, East and West separated by a puntha (cart track) with a population of 4000 and 1000 respectively. East Chodavaram boasts of an elementary and high school. The habitat in this panchayat consists of fallow agricultural lands fringed with rows of *Borassus flabellifer* while in West village, apart from Palmyra there is dense growth of Mesquite trees (*Prosopis juliflora*) and a few Tamarind and Neem trees. Both the habitats are under private ownership.

We had met Mr. Prasad Rao, the village Panchayat Secretary, elders of the village including the ex-village munsiff, Smt. Katyayani, Ex-Sarpanch of E. Chodavaram and Uppada Somaraju and made enquiries about the heronry. According to them, the Openbilled Storks start arriving in small groups soon after the first monsoon showers. After pairing, wooing and mating, they start nest building activity during July which goes on in August by late-comers. Clutches are laid during August-September and the birds immediately start incubating. At the time of our visit nest building was complete and some birds were actually incubating while others were on foraging missions. Some of the chicks had already hatched and they are looked after till they are able to fly. By Deepavali and sometimes by December end, the birds leave the habitat, to return only during the next breeding season. The villagers told us that the birds make a sojourn to Kolleru Lake and the neighbouring paddy fields for foraging.

The spatial distribution of the nests depends on the leaf growth of the Palmyra palms. Where there is less foliage, nests are precariously close to each other. In fairly dense foliage, nests are 1 to ½ feet apart. A single nest is built in the crown as it can accommodate only one pair. The nests in Palmyra palms are at a height of 30 to 35 feet, while those in Mesquite trees are 20 to 24 feet above the ground. The nesting vegetation preferred by the birds are Palmyra

palms and Mesquite trees though there is a sprinkling of Tamarind, Neem and Coconut trees in the vicinity.

The residents near the habitat told us that sometimes intraspecific competition for sites is noticed, especially in trees in which leaves have been harvested. The owners of the trees do not harvest all the leaves for the purpose of thatching their huts and leave four or five leaves in each tree.

We had counted a total of 98 nests in ten Palmyra and three Mesquite trees in both the panchayats. The birds in the vicinity of Smt. Katyayani's residence in Ayanum Nageswararao street were seen landing on the Neem tree, twisting and breaking the green Neem twigs, ferrying them to their nests and placing them around the inner nest. It is very likely that the Neem leaves are used to prevent or kill the bacteria in the nests. Some birds were seen preening their throats and wings, adjusting sticks in the nest while some were incubating. One pair was seen bending, stretching their necks together and slightly opening their mandibles and whispering.

In West Chodavaram we noticed Crows predating on the eggs in unguarded nests. While the crows were pecking at the eggs, a pair of Openbilled Storks in the adjacent nest appeared totally unconcerned. There was also no agnostic behaviour though the flying crows were almost brushing their wings.

Earlier around 2000 birds were reported to be breeding in this habitat. However, at present there are around 750 birds. Elders of the village informed us that the main reason for their decline is the cutting of the Palmyra trees which were in abundance. Consequently the birds have shifted to Puniashetram village (31°E and 17°N) near Rajahmundry in East Godavari District which is about 50 km. as the crow flies. They further informed us that a poacher by name Chanti used to poach the birds by catapult and sell them. Once he was caught red-handed and banned from the village. Due to the efforts of Alluru Krishna Rao, Ex-MLA of Ungutur anyone poaching is caught and fined heavily and this tradition still continues. The villagers do not feel that the birds are causing nuisance by their droppings. Residents like Uppada Somaraju have given up harvesting of the leaves for the sake of the birds. Senior citizens of the village claim that their village is the birthplace of '*Nattagottu konga*', implying that since times immemorial, the birds have been breeding in the village. Secure environment, adequate availability of nesting material and food appear to be the determining factors for the birds to still prefer this habitat. Being close to human habitation, this heronry is an 'associated' type of heronry.

For Private Circulation Only

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